

# Rare Carnivore Observations 2015

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## **Abstract**

In 2015, four reports of possible wolverines, and 2 reports of probable or possible Canada lynx were received. Thirty-five reports of confirmed and possible cougars were received. Three verified reports may represent a single cougar. For 56 reports where photo or field evidence was available, 3 (5%) were verified as cougar, 3 (5%) were inconclusive and were considered possible cougar, and 50 (89%) were determined to be something other than cougar.

## **Methods**

Observations of large carnivores, including timber wolf (*Canis lupus*), wolverine (*Gulo gulo*), Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), and cougar (*Puma concolor*) were collected from WDNR personnel, other natural resource agency personnel, and members of the general public in 2015.

Observations of rare carnivores were mostly reported via the WDNR large mammal website (<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/mammalobsform.asp>), or were reported less formally via e-mail, phone call, or office visit. All observations were classified as "verified", "probable", "possible", or "not likely". These classifications were made by the reporting biologists or by the authors, based on field evidence when available, level of documentation presented by the observer, or presence of additional evidence. Animals were classified as adults if they appeared to be  $\geq 1$  year old, but among carnivores, could include younger animals because adult size was achieved by 6 to 9 months. Animals less than 1 year old were classified as juveniles.

This report does not include tracks of rare carnivores found on winter furbearer transects which are reported in the August issue of Wisconsin Wildlife Surveys (Dhuey 2015). Wolf observations are not included in this report, and are published along with other wolf monitoring data.

## **Results & Discussion**

**Wolverine** – We received 13 reports of wolverine observations in 2015, compared to 11 reports in 2014 (Wiedenhoedt et al. 2015). Photos were submitted with one report (8%), which turned out to be a fisher. One other report indicated a video had been taken, which was requested but not received. The descriptions provided for this report and 7 additional reports (62%) were inconsistent with wolverine. Fisher, woodchuck, and raccoon are suspected for these reports. For the remaining 4 reports (31%), descriptions provided were inadequate to either conclude that a wolverine was likely seen or to discount wolverine. These reports were considered possible wolverine observations (Table 1, Figure 1), but most, or all, are likely misidentifications of fisher, badger, and woodchuck.

**Lynx** – Fourteen reports of lynx observations were received in 2015, compared to 8 reports received in 2014 (Wiedenhoedt et al. 2015). One report (7%) was classified as probable and one report (7%) was classified as a possible lynx observation (Table 2, Figure 1). Descriptions provided were inconsistent with lynx for the other 12 reports (86%). Most were likely bobcats, though some may have been housecats. The probable lynx observation occurred in Burnett County while the possible observation was reported from Vilas County.

**Cougar** – A total of 265 reports of cougar observations, tracks, or other sign, with adequate location and date information, were received in 2015. In 2014, 285 reports were recorded (Wiedenhoft et al. 2015). Additional reports lacked adequate information and were not cougar, based on submitted evidence (usually photos), so no further follow up was done. Those reports are not included here. Local DNR personnel are encouraged to conduct field checks when cougar reports are received in a timely manner, appear credible, and evidence is likely to still be present. We kept record of field checks when notified of them, but probably many more are done than those that are reported to us.

In 2015, 3 reports of cougar observations (1%) were verified (Table 3, Figure 1). Reports were verified by field checks to verify location of photos. A cougar was photographed in 2 locations in Langlade County on July 9<sup>th</sup>. Possibly the same cougar was photographed in Marinette County on July 19<sup>th</sup>.

Thirty-two reports (12%) lacked adequate descriptions or evidence to determine species or rule out cougar, and were considered possible cougar (Table 4, Figure 1). Most probably represent misidentifications, but some possibly are cougar. Photos were submitted for 3 reports but were inconclusive. Highest reporting rates were from the spring and summer months, April through September, especially June and July when people are spending additional time traveling and recreating outdoors. Possible reports were received from 24 counties with the highest number of reports from Douglas and Sheboygan counties with 3 each.

Two hundred thirty reports (87%) were classified as not likely cougar. Field checks were conducted for at least 7 of these reports. Field checks revealed a bobcat, a farm cat, dog tracks, tracks of various species other than cougar, no tracks in 2 cases, and an unidentified species not consistent with cougar. An additional 47 reports indicated photos were taken, and we requested the photos. Photos revealed 12 bobcats, 12 housecats, 8 cases of dog tracks, 5 dogs, 1 case of deer bones, 1 fox, 1 case of raccoon tracks, 1 case of unidentifiable tracks too small for cougar, 1 case of tracks of several species other than cougar, and 1 photo of a cougar taken in Missouri. Photos were not received for 4 of the requests, and descriptions were inconsistent with cougar. For 176 reports, no evidence was available, but descriptions provided were inconsistent with cougar.

### **Literature Cited**

Dhuey B., 2015. Winter track counts, 1977-2015. Wisconsin Wildlife Surveys, August 2015. (<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/WildlifeHabitat/documents/reports/wnrtracks2.pdf>).

Wiedenhoft, J.E., D.M MacFarland, and J. Bruner, 2015. Rare mammal observations 2014. Wisconsin Wildlife Surveys, April 2015. (<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/WildlifeHabitat/documents/reports/rarecarnobserv2.pdf>).

**Table 1.** *Possible reports of wolverine in Wisconsin in 2015.*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Number seen</b>	<b>Number tracks</b>	<b>Sec</b>	<b>Township</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Nearest Town</b>	<b>Agency<sup>1</sup></b>
05/13/15	1		15	30N	3E	Marathon	Athens	Private
06/05/15	1		28	40N	5W	Sawyer	Winter	Private
06/23/15	1		2	40N	5W	Sawyer	Stone Lake	Private
09/17/15	1		21	40N	3E	Price	Fifield	Private

<sup>1</sup>Agency for whom observer works

**Table 2.** *Possible and probable reports of lynx in Wisconsin in 2015.*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Number seen</b>	<b>Number tracks</b>	<b>Sec</b>	<b>Township</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Nearest Town</b>	<b>Agency<sup>1</sup></b>
11/08/15	1		4	41N	6E	Vilas	Boulder Junction	Private
12/08/15	1		15	42N	14W	Burnett	Wascott	Private

<sup>1</sup>Agency for whom observer works

**Table 3.** *Verified reports of cougars in Wisconsin in 2015.*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Number seen</b>	<b>Number tracks</b>	<b>Sec</b>	<b>Township</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Nearest Town</b>	<b>Agency<sup>1</sup></b>
07/09/15	1*		26	34N	10E	Langlade	Summit Lake	Private
07/09/16	1*		26	34N	11E	Langlade	Elcho	Private
07/19/16	1*		3	35N	21E	Marinette	Amberg	Private

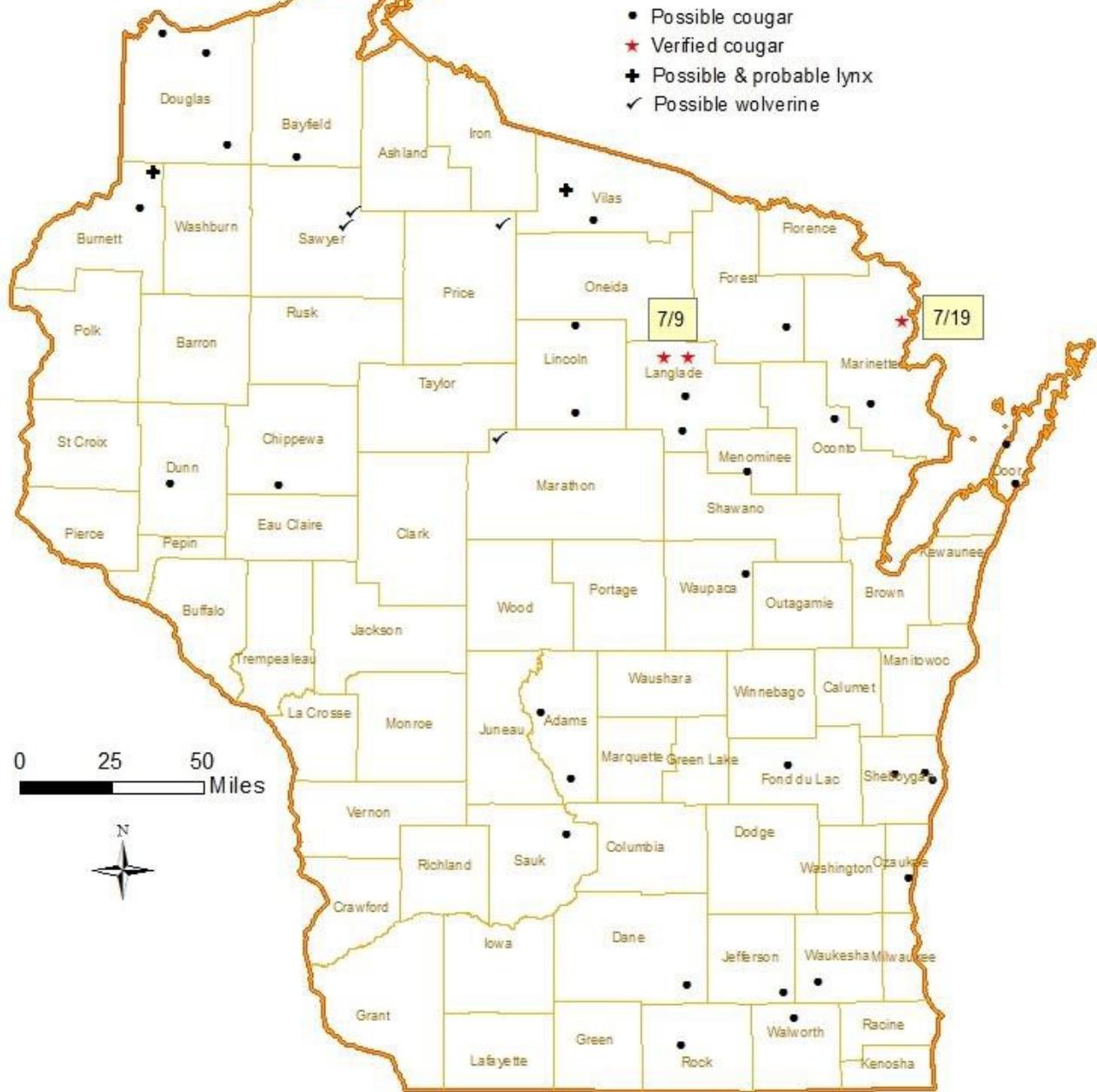
<sup>1</sup>Agency for whom observer works

\*Verified report

**Table 4.** *Possible reports of cougars in Wisconsin in 2015, by quarter.*

<b>County</b>	<b>Jan-Mar</b>	<b>Apr-Jun</b>	<b>Jul-Sep</b>	<b>Oct-Dec</b>	<b>Total</b>
Adams	0	2	0	0	2
Bayfield	0	1	0	0	1
Burnett	0	1	0	0	1
Chippewa	0	1	0	0	1
Dane	0	0	0	1	1
Door	0	2	0	0	2
Douglas	0	2	1	0	3
Dunn	0	1	0	0	1
Fond du Lac	0	1	0	0	1
Forest	0	1	0	0	1
Jefferson	0	1	0	0	1
Langlade	0	0	1	1	2
Lincoln	0	1	1	0	2
Marinette	0	1	0	0	1
Menominee	0	0	1	0	1
Oconto	0	1	0	0	1
Ozaukee	0	0	1	0	1
Rock	0	1	0	0	1
Sauk	0	1	0	0	1
Sheboygan	0	1	2	0	3
Vilas	0	0	1	0	1
Walworth	0	0	1	0	1
Waukesha	0	0	1	0	1
Waupaca	0	1	0	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>32</b>

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**Figure 1.** Reported possible, probable, and verified rare carnivore observations in Wisconsin during 2015.