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## **Wolves to the Rescue**

It's not for nothin' that wolves are the top dogs.

As wolves return to the West, scientists have focused much of their research on how wolves help recover overgrazed ecosystems. Turns out wolves could also play an important role in helping to save the Canada lynx, an animal protected as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 2000.

A key factor in lynx decline is the significant loss of snowshoe hares, according to new research from scientists at Oregon State University, the University of Washington and the University of Wyoming. Hares are the big-pawed cats' primary prey. But in the decades-long absence of wolves, coyotes—with their own habit for hares—filled the void. Their population surged and expanded in all directions from their original habitat in the Great Plains.

“Before they were largely extirpated, wolves used to kill coyotes and also disrupt their behavior through what we call the ‘ecology of fear,’” says ecologist William Ripple, lead author of the study. “Coyotes have a flexible, wide-ranging diet, but they really prefer rabbits and hares, and they may also be killing lynx directly.”

In many scientific studies in recent years, researchers have documented how wolves and other large predators help keep deer and elk populations in check, allowing the recovery of trees, shrubs and streams to the benefit of many plant and wildlife species.

“This study provides yet another reason why wolves are so important,” says David Gaillard, Defenders' Northern Rockies representative. “As these scientists concluded, the ecological role of these top predators and the number of them it takes to fulfill a wide range of ecological goals

should be considered when determining how many wolves should be maintained in our wild areas.”