

May 27, 2008

To the Editor,

The Cougar Fund, a national nonprofit dedicated to the conservation of the cougar throughout its present and historic range, works on behalf of its members to ensure that cougar management, as well as management of their prey, are always held to the highest standards of peer-reviewed science. In addition to educating the public about the many issues that surround cougars, we look to balance human interests with healthy cougar populations. With these efforts in mind, The Cougar Fund would like to comment on David Kitchell's May 24 story about the possibility of increased cougar sightings in urban areas.

First, The Cougar Fund was concerned that the article mistakenly identified "bobcat" as an alternate name for cougars. The cougar, or *puma concolor*, and the bobcat are, in fact, two different and very distinct animals. Alternate names for the cougar include mountain lion, puma, catamount, painter, and ghost cat. The Cougar Fund feels it is of critical importance to public awareness and understanding and that these two species—however closely related—are clearly differentiated. Some key differences between the cougar and bobcat include the bobcat's significantly smaller size—a bobcat typically weighs between 15 and 30 pounds and a cougar between 75 and 150 pounds—, difference in color, and tail length.

Additionally, while Dr. Lorraine Corriveau's comments regarding cougar migration and their reclusive nature are essentially concurrent with scientific data, the Cougar Fund was disappointed that Mr. Kitchell declined to interview a wildlife biologist specializing in cougar behavior patterns and/ or human interaction. However, while we would like to corroborate and commend most of Dr. Corriveau's comments as they pertain to the minimal likelihood of cougars attacking humans as well as the potential for cougar migration over large land areas, there are some statements we would like to further clarify.

While the article cited Dr. Corriveau as suggesting that state wildlife officials primarily track cougars to alert people in the area to their presence, cougars are tracked for numerous important reasons including population studies, habitat density information, and prey/ predator data. Because of their highly reclusive nature, alerting the public to a cougar's presence is rarely necessitated.

Cougars are a self-regulating species, determined by food, habitat and social order. A single cougar requires a minimum of 50- 100 square miles to breed, raise young, hunt and survive, however, that need for space does not necessarily mean cougars will continue to move eastward or into urban areas. Over-hunting in states such as South Dakota has resulted in a high number of juvenile males being displaced, causing those cougars to

venture into areas—such as suburban or even urban neighborhoods—that cougars would traditionally prefer to avoid.

Because cougars are an often misunderstood and misrepresented species, the Cougar Fund strives to ensure the integrity of information dispersed on the species in hopes of promoting a better understanding of the animal. With that being said, we would like to emphasize that by nature, cougars are reclusive, preferring to avoid contact with humans at all costs. They even avoid other cougars, except at mating season. Cougar and human interactions are extremely rare, but will no doubt continue to increase as humans venture further into cougar habitat, despite the fact that viable cougar populations were hunted to extinction throughout the east.

The Cougar Fund is always available to answer questions or provide data and we look forward to your response.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Emorie Broemel
Communications Coordinator