



Board of Directors
Marc Bekoff, Ph.D.
H. Webb Blesley
Patricio Robles Gil
Dr. Jane Goodall, Ph.D., DBE
Rick Hopkins, Ph.D.
Robert W. Koons
Cara Blesley Lowe
Thomas D. Mangelsen, Ph.D.
Corinne R. Rutledge

*****This comment is intended to be included on the public record*****

Dear Senators,

The Cougar Fund is a national organization dedicated to providing education about and protection of “*America’s Greatest Cat*.” We are reaching out to you regarding Senate Bill No. 76, entitled “An Act to revise certain provisions relating to the killing of mountain lions that threaten personal safety or property,” and we have grave concerns about the language contained in this proposed revision.

Of particular concern is the newfound emphasis placed on the “threat” of a mountain lion to a person’s “safety.” Such wording creates an opening for the unnecessary killing of mountain lions in situations where there may be no credible threat whatsoever. Given that mountain lions are large predators (albeit, not of humans), it is somewhat understandable why a person might be frightened by the sight or presence of a cougar. Fearfulness alone, however, is a very subjective standard, which could be interpreted to encompass mere sightings or even fleeing cougars. Given that South Dakota records list only one “probable but unverified” lion attack on a human, such fear is largely unfounded, and is based more on folklore than reality.

The problem with this type of wording – and the incredible amount of discretion it gives to an individual who might *perceive* normal lion behavior as a threat – has already been observed in South Dakota. In December 2013 near Tripp, a group of nine pheasant hunters (six of whom were armed), accompanied by two hunting dogs, killed a mountain lion because they felt “threatened.” However, given the size of the group and the presence of dogs, it is extremely unlikely that the cat would have attacked. This scenario could become commonplace if SB 76 is approved. Even worse, the new wording could open the door to abuses and result in rash, spiteful killings of lions. South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks have never issued a citation under the current law following an unlicensed killing; to further liberalize this law is unnecessary and will remove any remaining deterrent to wanton killing of mountain lions.

An increase in the number of “self defense” killings would have a significant additive effect on top of the already established hunting season in the state and could have serious ramifications for the population. Particularly worrying is the potential for indiscriminate killing of females with kittens and dispersing animals. Biologically, these are the most important members of the population, and SB 76 increases the likelihood that they will be killed for inadequate reasons.



There are already adequate measures in place to deal with mountain lions that pose potential threats to human life and property in South Dakota. The authority to lethally remove problem animals lies with SDGFP, and on the evidence, the agency lethally removed a substantial number of lions in 2013 (at least 12 confirmed). In addition, the current wording of the law (§ 41-6-29.2) already gives individuals the legal right to kill a mountain lion when their life or property is threatened. The combination of these two control mechanisms has proven highly successful in preventing mountain lion attacks and depredations.

It is the success of your current system that compels us to ask: “*What is the REAL motivation for this change?*”

Given the current language of the law and the incredible rarity of dangerous encounters with mountain lions, such extreme measures as those proposed in SB 76 seem unjustified and unnecessary. Management of such a rare and important species should be based on science and good judgment, not fear and knee-jerk reactions. We urge you to seriously consider the negative consequences SB 76 would have for South Dakota’s precious mountain lion population.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these comments,

Mike Canetta
The Cougar Fund
307-733-0797
125 N. Cache (Upstairs)
P.O. Box 122
Jackson, WY 83001-0122