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

Dear Senator,

The Cougar Fund is a national organization dedicated to the protection of mountain lions and other large carnivores. Our preferred strategy is one of education about predators and civil communication with wildlife management decision-makers and with lawmakers.

People are very important to us, as are their families, pets and livestock. However, as we place increasing stress on the wild environment—by greater urbanization and fragmentation of natural habitat—we have a responsibility to learn wise and safe ways to co-exist. In this regard, we are committed to the use of **sound science** as a basis for **policy** and **conflict prevention** as a means for **safety** within communities.

Senate Bill 6287 recently passed out of the Senate Natural Resources and Parks Committee and will be headed for a vote very soon. We would like to extend our thanks for allowing us to submit comments on this emerging bill.

Statutes and policies regarding large carnivores are complicated by the traditional and mythical threats that wild animals such as wolves, bears and cougars have been encumbered with. The very title of SB 6287 as a 'Cougar Control' program is itself misleading. Cougars, as territorial, obligate carnivores actually 'control' their own populations through either dispersal or competitive mortality. The sincere belief that cougar populations are now increasing may actually be the result of human expansion into cougar territory, death of a hierarchically senior animal and subsequent immigration of inexperienced juvenile males seeking to fill the vacant territory. These inexperienced cougars may pose more of a challenge as they not only have to vie for the available food but also for the 'right' to claim the territory for themselves.

The University of Washington has been the source of the most exemplary and cutting edge research into mountain lions in the last three decades. While other states may not expect these findings to be exactly replicated in their area, Washington can be confident that the science was conducted on their own soil, with their own animals. The results of this research consistently indicate that sport hunting of cougars, with or without the use of hounds, is not in the best interests of livestock growers as a method of reducing depredation.



Reducing depredation and protecting livestock growers' investments and ensuring public safety are common goals. However, we do differ in how that goal is reached, and it seems that scientists, and even wildlife managers are beginning to look at alternatives to hunting as the solution.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife has an effective response plan to deal with depredation incidents, which includes the removal of confirmed "offenders" by trained department personnel. This should continue; as should the forward-thinking educational programs that empower good husbandry by the incorporation of conflict prevention. There has been recent and welcome expansion within the Department of Fish and Wildlife in this area.

We can identify with your need to guarantee the protection of people, pets and livestock from negative encounters with cougars. Now we must ask, "What is the best solution?" not only for these interests, but also for the biodiversity that will be our legacy to the overall integrity of the environment.

There is science that tells us that aggressive removal of cougars is NOT the answer, and hunting with hounds is the most aggressive method of all. This may be a provocative idea to those who sincerely believe hound hunting is the only way, and their concerns are valid, but there are better solutions. Washington State has been emerging as a leader in proactive resolutions. You consult with scientists, collaborate with advocacy groups to raise public awareness, and have even formulated forward-thinking legislation in the form of the proposed HB 1501 for responding to wolves.

Please don't interrupt your state's progressive and open-minded attitude towards wildlife management by voting for the reactive and scientifically unsound SB 6287. This bill usurps the authority of wildlife managers to selectively cull "problem" animals, is based on perceptions of age and gender identification that are not quite as simple as presented, and has no way of assuring that the target animal is indeed responsible for depredations. What starts as a "pilot" for "control", with little actual accountability, may easily become a vigilante-styled alternative for comprehensive management.

The Cougar Fund respectfully asks that you consider ways to protect your constituents based on progress and prevention by rejecting SB 6287

Sincerely,

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preserve. protect. balance.

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