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February 13, 2015

Dear Members of the House Agricultural and Natural Resources Committee,

Greetings, thank you for considering the comments of The Cougar Fund as you deliberate HB 2050 and HB 2181. We are a national organization dedicated to the protection of mountain lions and other large carnivores.

Measure 18 was, and is, viewed as a vanguard initiative, responding as it did to the voice of your citizens. Measure 18 upheld the standards of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation in that it allowed for equality of opportunity and some degree of Fair Chase.

The data distributed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) indicates that the state has very successfully decreased the number of conflicts between people, their interests and cougars from a high of 1072 in 1999 to 287 in 2013. During this time the harvest by boot hunters has remained fairly stable with 200-300 animals killed every year. Both of these statistics are especially important given that there has been a dramatic increase in license sales-to in excess of 50,000 per year. The benefits of living in your beautiful state have drawn in new citizens to the tune of 500,000 additional residents largely coexisting peacefully with wildlife. Both statistics are even more profound given that there have been recently publicized figures to indicate that the population of mountain lions may also have increased quite substantially, although no empirical data exists to confirm this.

As it stands today, Oregon can be very proud of the success of education in promoting and achieving public safety. **What you have been doing is working!** Therefore, it is quite unexpected that you would seek to change your formula.

Perhaps the easiest way to illustrate our deep opposition to HB 2050 and HB 2181 is to ask you to consider the consequences if these Bills move forward. Ramifications would fall into several broad categories:

Safety

- ODFW already has a 'zero-tolerance' conflict response and the tools available already include the effective use of hounds. The agency has proven that this protocol, carried out by trained and professional staff members has, together with conscientious education efforts, reduced conflict.



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- Recent and on-going research from Washington State continues to support that populations of mountain lions, being intrinsically hierarchical, can easily be destabilized by the taking of dominant animals. Hound hunting, while providing for greater selectivity, also allows the hunters to more often remove mature trophy lions. This contributes to a reduction in the average age of the population and has been seen to result in increases in conflict and depredation by juvenile, inexperienced animals.
- Hound hunting also opens up the possibility of trespass, collateral losses of domestic animals, native wild prey (especially during fawning), and property damage. How will county lines be addressed.... the hounds certainly will not be able to recognize them!

Politically

- Widespread participation in the exemption would increase the potential to reach the disturbingly high quota of nearly 1000 animals.
This would be unprecedented in all of the states (13) that have sport hunting of cougars.
Is Oregon really ready to be associated with such extreme destruction of a species held in the Public Trust for ALL its citizens and risk their reputation as a destination for visitors from all over the nation and beyond?
- What will happen when the objective population goals are met? When quota reductions are necessary to maintain a sustainable population, will only those counties that contributed to increased harvest, by choosing the exemption, be targeted for reduced opportunity?
- The sale of 50,000 licenses is a substantial contribution to the revenue of ODFW even though harvests have remained stable. This revenue will most certainly decline when hunter satisfaction is decreased by inequality of opportunity.

Philosophically

- The references, in the 2006 Oregon Cougar Management Plan, concerning declining ungulate populations raise the ethical question of whether one species should be managed to the detriment or benefit of another. Predators and prey have evolved together over millennia. They complement the enhanced biodiversity of the landscape. The greatest threat to all wildlife is the loss of habitat to encroachment and fragmentation. Historic ungulate numbers cannot be expected without historic forage to support them. Large carnivores are mistakenly and often gratuitously blamed for struggling prey species.



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- It is unacceptable to manage cougars as scapegoats for the results of indiscriminate human expansion.
- There is absolutely NO science that tells us we need to hunt mountain lions for recreation. Hunting is *random culling* which is an ineffective tool to assure public safety. In fact the opposite may be true because of the hierarchical destabilization previously mentioned. Conflict prevention and responsive, rather than reactive, conflict removal are far more effective risk managers.

Thank you for considering the comments of The Cougar Fund. As you decide the fate of HB 2050 and HB 2181 please remember the fact that the ODFW figures show your current regulations are working. *Harvest is stable, conflict is down and the cougar population estimates cannot be scientifically verified without extensive research and additional funding.* As we have pointed out selective exemptions to Measure 18 may cause significantly more problems than they would solve.

Measure 18 set Oregon apart. The ecological integrity of your landscape would not be the only casualty of these initiatives. The uniformity of your democratic process would also be at stake.

Please accept these remarks with the same respect with which they have been submitted. We have attached synopses and references to further reading material with this letter.

We urge you to prevent HB20150 and HB 2181 from advancing out of committee.

Sincerely,

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<http://cahnrs.wsu.edu/news-release/2012/09/25/new-paradigm-wsu-research-prompts-state-policy-to-reduce-cougar-problems-and-overharvest-maintain-ample-hunting/>

- “Juvenile males can only survive by avoiding adult males. When hunting removes most adult males, the adolescent males survive and cause all sorts of trouble. While adult cougars tend to avoid humans and livestock, juveniles are less cautious: “They’re teenagers,” explained Wielgus. “They’re sexually mature, but mentally they’re not all there.”

<http://conservationmagazine.org/2009/11/troubled-teens/>

- “As hunters kill disproportionate numbers of mature, male cougars, a generation of disorderly teenage cats is taking over their turf. Without adults to keep them in check, Wielgus believes, the unruly juveniles are more likely to run afoul of humans, livestock and pets. Cougars aren’t the only species with troubled teens. Off the Florida coast, small sharks attack swimmers more often than large ones do. In Africa, orphaned male elephants have killed humans and rhinoceroses. And in the southwestern U.S., young California condors have destroyed roof tiles and torn off windshield wipers after being released into the wild. The naughty condor behavior decreased markedly when researchers began a “mentoring” program that houses puppet-reared chicks with an adult condor for about a year before they are released. And the marauding elephants calmed down when older bulls were introduced. In a provocative theory that suggests adolescent wildlife may be surprisingly similar to human teenagers, some scientists believe adult supervision could be the key to better behavior for cougars, too.”

<https://panthera.org/sites/default/files/Robinson%20et%20al%202008%20-%20Sources%20sinks%20and%20carnivores.pdf>

- “Our data support the compensatory immigration sink hypothesis; cougar removal in small game management areas (,1000 km²) increased immigration and recruitment of younger animals from adjacent areas, resulting in little or no reduction in local cougar densities and a shift in population structure toward younger animals.”

http://www.albertaparks.ca/media/4477103/preventing_conflict_with_wildlife-cougars.pdf

- “As Alberta experiences expansion in both cougar and human territories, human-cougar conflicts remain rare. Most problems involve juvenile cougars that are struggling to establish their own territories and find suitable prey.”



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<http://westernwildlife.org/cougar-outreach-project/biology-behavior/>

- “Dispersing juveniles are particularly at risk of coming into conflict with resident cougars and with human interests. Resident male cougars will attempt to drive off and even kill juveniles in defense of their home ranges. Moreover, a large percentage of cougar attacks on livestock (and people) are by one- to two-year old cougars.”

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/critic-of-higher-lion-kill-calls-quota-into-question/article_867ae93c-e72d-11e0-95bb-001cc4c002e0.html

- “Mountain lions that come into conflict with people or their livestock and pets are typically younger animals, based on state records and news stories. As the GF&P Commission increased the annual kill quota in lion seasons and more cats were killed, the average age of the population has declined, Kanta said. “I do agree that as you harvest more lions you lower that average age, and that certainly could result in situations that at least leave the appearance of more conflict,” Kanta said.”

<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0079713>

- “As expected, we found that complaints and depredations were positively associated with human population, livestock population, and cougar population. However, contrary to expectations we found that complaints and depredations were most strongly associated with cougars harvested the previous year. We suggest that increased young male immigration, social disruption of cougar populations, and associated changes in space use by cougars - caused by increased hunting resulted in the increased complaints and livestock depredations. Widespread indiscriminate hunting does not appear to be an effective preventative and remedial method for reducing predator complaints and livestock depredations.”

<https://www.wildlifemanagementinstitute.org/PDF/4-Effects%20of%20WhiteTailed....pdf>

- “Our results suggested that heavy hunting resulted in a decrease in the age of resident cougars and could have resulted in increased cougar-human conflicts because subadults are believed to be the age class responsible for most such conflicts.”