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The Honorable Brad Witt, Chair
House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

Testimony by
Stan Steele, President
Oregon Outdoor Council
House Bill 2624 & HB 3395

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The Oregon Outdoor Council appreciates the opportunity to present the viewpoints held by many of Oregon's nearly one million anglers, hunters and trappers regarding the contentious issue of predator - prey management. House Bill 2624 and HB 3395 exemplify the consumptive sporting community's commitment to science-based adaptive management of all of Oregon's wildlife and their habitats.

Oregon sportsmen and women understand and support the statutory obligations of ORS 496.012 (Wildlife Policy) that directs the state to manage wildlife and make decisions ***that benefit the wildlife resources*** and allow for the ***best social, economic and recreational utilization*** by all Oregonians and our visitors. Oregon's Wildlife Policy dictates that wildlife shall be managed to prevent serious depletion of any indigenous species and to provide the optimum recreational and aesthetic benefits for present and future generations of the citizens of this state.

The Oregon Outdoor Council believes that it is impossible to achieve the co-equal goals set forth in the state's wildlife policy without having reasonable and prudent access to all scientifically effective harvest management tools. **House Bill 2624** would allow for the respective citizens of Oregon's thirty-six counties, through either an initiative petition process, or referral to the citizens by the governing body of the county, the right to determine by popular vote if the hunting of black

bears and cougar with dogs and the use of bait are acceptable wildlife harvest management methods. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife retains all control over bag limits, quotas, tags, season dates and every part of cougar and bear management. The bill does not authorize county governments to manage wildlife; it only allows voters to decide if they want dogs and bait used for harvest management purposes in their respective county.

House Bill 3395 would recommend rules to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission regarding the creation of a pilot program that allows persons to use dogs to hunt and pursue cougars with certain permits and tags. Individual county governments can request through application to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission to be included in the pilot cougar management program.

Neither legislative action would result in the cougar population dropping below the Oregon Cougar Management Plan's statewide minimum population threshold of 3,000. There are 289 pages of laws in the Oregon Wildlife and Commercial Fishing Code that attempt to balance all aspects of the public's desire to engage in wildlife interactions with co-equal requirements to protect and promote the health of Oregon's wildlife and their habitats.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, working with stakeholders through an extensive public process, developed the 2006 Cougar Management Plan (the Plan) that was adopted by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission on April 13, 2006. The Plan's five objectives seek to maintain viable, healthy cougar populations, reduce conflicts with cougars, and manage cougars in a manner compatible with other game mammal species.

Based on the adaptive management strategies of the Plan, hunting of cougars and bear with dogs or bait simply will not cause massive declines to Oregon's highly robust black bear and cougar populations. Population objectives for each of the six cougar management zones were established by the Plan with an annual statewide mortality quota set at 777 for 2012. The statewide quota includes all forms of cougar mortality; hunting, damage control, public safety removal, road kills, administrative removal and other undermined causes.

2012 Cougar Mortality:

- Hunting 251 32%
- Damage 126 16%
- Safety 46 6%
- Road kill 17 2%
- Other 27 3%
- Administrative 56 7%
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- TOTAL 523 66% (34% or another 254 could have been available for expanded sport harvest opportunities)
- Quota 777 34%

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife often receives criticism from animal rights advocates who claim that the Oregon's cougar population is being grossly overestimated. Oregon's cougar population estimates are based on the application of peer-reviewed science and a non-random, density-dependent population model published in 2002 (Keister, G.P. and W.A. Van Dyke 2002. *A Predictive Population Model for Cougars in Oregon*, Northwest Science 76:15-25).

The hunting of cougars with dogs is not a biological issue in respect to the scientific management of Oregon's cougar population, but is another troubling example of an increasingly urban population's diminishing social acceptance of hunting, fishing and trapping connected lifestyles. The most egregious threat to scientifically regulated hunting, fishing and trapping recreation is the general public's lack of knowledge regarding the guiding principles of wildlife management and what constitutes wise conservation of our natural resources.

The two bills before the committee today have the ability to renew several of Oregon's socially important and biologically defensible hunting traditions. They also strengthen our conservation value system that many Oregon hunters, anglers and trappers feel is quickly disappearing from a rapidly coarsening and natural resource disconnected urban society.

The irony of "houndsmen" being banned from hunting cougars with their trailing dogs is not lost on the Oregon Outdoor Council and is very problematic to thousands of Oregon hunters, anglers and trappers and begs the question, what outdoor recreational sport is next? Apparently, the answer is trapping, the same renewable natural resources harvest method that the Beaver State was founded on. Then what, archery hunting - maybe steelhead fishing with bait, where does the madness end? This reminds us of the saying "If I don't have the right to tell how to live your life, then who does?"

Hound hunters were the single most effective societal component calling for the 1967 legislative assembly to elevate Oregon's largest feline from a common predator - shoot on sight status, (which for most of the state's 150 year history had been financially supported by a bounty system) to the same protected game mammal status as black bear, mule deer, blacktail deer, whitetail deer, Rocky Mountain and Roosevelt elk, big horn sheep, and antelope. Game mammal status allows the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to actively manage Oregon's black bear and cougar populations by setting hunting seasons, bag limits and methods of harvest.

In 1994, Measure 18, a statewide citizen Ballot Measure, passed which banned the use of dogs and bait for cougar and bears after a lengthy and disingenuous campaign led by animal rights advocates. The loss of the most effective recreational harvest method (the use of trailing dogs to hunt cougar and bear) has had a devastating effect on Oregon's deer, elk and big horn sheep herds. The state's rapidly expanding cougar population has substantially lowered huntable populations of numerous big game mammals from the Snake River to our coastal beaches. The biologically significant survival reductions caused by cougar and bear predation on elk calves and deer fawns ultimately cost the state millions of dollars in lost license and tag revenue and suppress rural economic growth through declining hunter/tourism expenditures. Livestock losses are occurring in areas in numbers unheard of just a decade ago and some livestock producers blame unmanaged predation as the main cause for their business failure. Cougar sightings and resultant public health and safety concerns are becoming common place and some ODFW biologists refer to themselves as cougar complaint managers due to the time they spend on cataloging and mitigating complaints.

Dogs are still being used to hunt and kill cougars and bears in Oregon. It is done administratively, and at a cost of hundreds of thousands dollars of critical wildlife funds. The Oregon Outdoor Council and our affiliates believe that sportsmen and women should be harvesting Oregon's big game mammals instead of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife paying state-approved agents and federal wildlife damage officials.

The Oregon Outdoor Council requests that the members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources support passage of both House Bill 2624 and House Bill 3395. The Oregon Outdoor Council believes the time has come to let the citizens that are most adversely impacted by Oregon's current cougar and bear harvest policies vote on how to resolve our state's most contentious big game management issue.

Thank You,

Stan Steele, President
Oregon Outdoor Council

	Hunting	Damage	Safety	Roadkill	Other	Admin	TOTAL
STATE TOTAL	251	126	46	17	27	56	523
QUOTA							777

