



HUMANE VOTERS | OREGON

Testimony of Humane Voters Oregon on House Bill 2795
House Committee on Natural Resources

February 20, 2019

Chair Witt and Members of the Committee:

Humane Voters Oregon (previously known as Humane Oregon) is a nonprofit organization that works in Oregon's political process and elections to promote humane treatment of animals. We have board members from several organizations within the animal welfare community but are not affiliated with any other state or national organization.

Humane Voters Oregon opposes House Bill 2795.

HB 2795 provides for what it calls a "pilot program," but it really is just another proposal to resume sport hunting of cougars with dogs. Oregon voters have said twice – on ballot measures in 1994 and 1996 – that they consider it inhumane and unsporting to hunt cougars with packs of dogs. (The dogs chase the cougar up a tree or into another place where it has no escape and the "hunter" shoots it at close range.) The Legislature should not undermine this will of the voters without a compelling reason supported by reliable evidence. There is no such compelling reason or reliable evidence.

The arguments given for resumed hunting with hounds are that we now have too many cougars such that they pose an unreasonable threat to public safety, farm animals and/or "game" animals, and that the only way to adequately reduce their numbers is to resume sport hunting with dogs. (Remember that cougars may still be hunted with hounds to address safety and wildlife management goals.) However, there is no reliable evidence to support these claims. Consider these facts from the state's official Cougar Management Plan adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission in October 2017):

- "Except for Zone A [Coast/North Cascades], non-hunting cougar mortalities due to human safety/pet conflicts have been stable throughout most of the state and complaints are also stable or declining." (Page 61.)
- "With the exception of Zone A, [even] cougar *complaints* [from 2007 through 2016] are stable or declining across much of Oregon." (Page 38 (emphasis added).) (With respect to Zone A, ODFW noted by press release November 27, 2018: "Total mortality in the Zone has reached the quota of 180, a number which includes all cougars killed by hunters or due to damage and public safety issues. While hunting is now closed, landowners experiencing damage or public safety issues may continue to take cougars in Zone A." Thus, any problem with cougars in Zone A apparently was addressed without resumed sport hunting with dogs.)
- "Some studies have indicated a relationship between intensive cougar removals and an increase in livestock depredation and human-cougar conflicts due to an influx of juvenile males." (Page 38.)

- Whether cougars are limiting factors for ungulate populations (deer, elk, etc.) is far from clear.¹ (Page 10.)
- Increased killing of cougars to recover mule deer populations in the Steens and Warner management areas was found to *not* benefit the deer population. (Page 61.)
- The number of cougars killed by hunters in 2016 (measured by “Harvest Check In”) is approximately 80% higher than the number of cougars killed by hunters before Measure 18 prohibited the use of dogs. (Page 30.)
- A model used by the ODFW to estimate cougar population growth in Northeast Oregon showed “the cougar population subjected to hunting *with* dogs was increasing at a faster rate than one that was *not* hunted with dogs.” (Pages 40-41 (emphasis added).) This was attributed in part to the targeting of male cougars with hound hunting while female survival is a primary driver of population growth.

As a final point, we note an inherent contradiction in the claims of those advocating for resumed sport hunting of cougars with dogs: (1) cougars are so numerous they constitute a threat to public safety and wildlife; and (2) we can’t find cougars to shoot unless we have dogs.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Brian Posewitz

Brian Posewitz

Board Member/Administrator

¹ “There is a large body of literature to suggest a complex suite of abiotic, bottom-up, and top-down forces including hunter harvest, predation, primary productivity, and climatic conditions may be limiting or regulating factors of ungulate population dynamics.”