

Submitter: Randall Bonner
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and
Wildfire
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB769
In Support of Oregon SB 769

Honorable Members of the Senate Committee,

I am submitting this testimony in support of SB 769, which would give counties the ability to allow the use of dogs in cougar management. This is a necessary tool that has been stripped away from rural communities, with devastating consequences.

On February 6, 2024, two cougars came onto our farm and killed our rare breed sheep, ending our family's breeding program and affecting our livelihood. Two ewes were killed in the early morning and dragged to the fenceline but left behind. That evening, our ram was killed. In spite of the cougar being shot at when I heard the dogs barking, it returned and stashed the dead ram, which we found in the morning. That evening, trapper Eric Lee set traps and successfully caught both cougars—a mother and her year-old male kitten.

We were home the entire time, and despite having a sturdy wire perimeter, electric fencing, shelters, lighting, and two well-trained livestock guardian dogs, the cougars were undeterred. The failure of these non-lethal measures is proof that Oregon's current cougar management policies are inadequate. These predators had no fear of people or our dogs. Decades of restrictions on hound hunting have led to cougars losing their natural wariness of humans and domestic animals, making them bolder and more dangerous.

Cougar management is not just about livestock. My fiancée's youngest child was 13 at the time of the attack and regularly feeds our dogs in the same pasture where the sheep were killed. My fiancée's older child is a skinny young adult with autism who does his daily chores alone in the barn, which is less than 50 yards from our house. Either of them could have just as easily been attacked. I also have an 18-month-old son who loves being outside. The lack of fear these cougars exhibit makes it increasingly dangerous to be a child in the country. In a world where children already spend too much time indoors, I don't want to have to tell my baby that he can't play outside because it's too dangerous. This is not a hypothetical fear—this is the reality we live with in rural Oregon.

The state encourages non-lethal management, and we have done everything within our power to comply. But when those methods fail, we need real solutions.

Reinstating the use of trained dogs for cougar control is not just a matter of livestock protection—it is a matter of public safety.

I urge you to pass SB 769 and return local control over cougar management to the people who live with the consequences of these policies.

Sincerely,
Randall Joel Bonner
Everfree Farm, Philomath, Oregon