



# HUMANE VOTERS | OREGON

## Testimony of Humane Voters Oregon on Senate Bill 769 Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire

February 10, 2025

Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash, and Members of the Committee:

Humane Voters Oregon is a nonprofit organization that works in Oregon's political process and elections to promote humane treatment of animals. We are not affiliated with any other state or national organization.

Humane Voters Oregon opposes Senate Bill 769.

SB 769 would allow individual counties to opt out of voter-approved protections for cougars. Specifically, it would allow hunting of cougars with dogs in individual counties if voters in just that county approve a measure to allow it.

Statewide voters banned cougar hunting with dogs in 1994 (Measure 18) and voted against repealing that ban in 1996 (Measure 34). Assuming they were responding to arguments in the campaign, they voted that way because they considered hunting cougars with dogs unsporting and inhumane. When cougars are hunted with dogs, the dogs track and chase a cougar until it climbs a tree or otherwise becomes cornered, and then a "hunter" shoots the cougar from close range when it has no chance of escape.

Individual counties should not be allowed to exempt themselves from the Measure 18. The majority of voters who said it was inhumane to hunt cougars with dogs weren't just saying that for cougars hunted in their counties. They were saying that for cougars hunted everywhere, and our system of state laws allowed them to make that decision at least for cougars hunted anywhere in Oregon.

This is not an issue where only people living close to an activity are affected by it. The effect is on the consciousness of anyone who cares about animals and wants them treated humanely, regardless of where they live and regardless of where the inhumane treatment occurs.

Hunting cougars with dogs will not reduce conflicts between cougars and people or increase populations of deer and elk. The most recent science says otherwise. Indeed, it suggests we shouldn't be hunting cougars at all. (See, e.g., [Evidence Does Not Support Hunting As A Way To Control Cougars: Study](#), Oregon Public Broadcasting, Feb. 24, 2020.)

Allowing individual counties to opt out of ballot measures they don't like would also set a bad precedent and undermine our system of state laws. Since 1902, Oregonians have passed 132 ballot measures by initiative. ([Oregon Blue Book, Almanac & Fact Book](#).) Certainly, there are

many others among those that not every county supported. Looking back just at the years since Measure 18 passed, there have been initiatives to allow physician assisted suicide (Measure 16 in 1994), increase the minimum wage (Measure 36 in 1996 and Measure 25 in 2002), require background checks for firearms (Measure 5 in 2000) and prohibit the sale of endangered animal parts (Measure 100 in 2016), all of which were opposed by at least some counties. It makes no more sense to let counties opt out of a measure to require humane treatment of cougars than it does to let them opt out of any other ballot measure.

The passage of time since Measure 18 is no reason to let individual counties decide to resume hunting cougars with dogs. There is no reason to think voters would make a different choice today. If anything, voters have become more sympathetic to animal welfare concerns, not less.

The primary argument for resumed hunting of cougars with dogs is that we have too many cougars and they pose an unreasonable threat to public safety, farm animals and other hunted wildlife such as deer and elk; and that the only way to adequately reduce their numbers is to resume sport hunting with dogs. (Cougars can still be hunted with dogs to address safety and wildlife management goals.) However, there is no reliable scientific 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.<sup>1</sup> (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.)

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<sup>1</sup> “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.”

- 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.)
- ODFW estimated cougar growth rates based on study of data from Northeast Oregon and found that cougar populations grew faster when they *were* hunted with dogs than when they *were not* hunted with dogs. The Cougar Management Plan states: “Given that hunting cougars with dogs typically results in increased harvest and reduced survival rates of cougars, it was unexpected that the cougar population subjected to hunting with dogs was increasing at a faster rate than one that was not hunted with dogs. However, cougar populations in Oregon were subjected to low harvest rates when hunting cougars with dogs was legal and harvest was male biased. This resulted in high survival rates of female cougars and as population growth rates were seen to be most sensitive to changes in female survival, high population growth rates occurred.” (Pages 40-41.)

As a final point, there is 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 enough cougars to shoot (or get close enough to them) unless we have dogs to track and chase them.

For the above reasons, we urge you to oppose SB 769.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Brian Posewitz  
Director