



OREGON HUNTERS ASSOCIATION

Protecting Oregon's Wildlife, Habitat and Hunting Heritage

P.O. Box 1706, Medford, OR 97501 • (541) 772-7313
oha@oregonhunters.org • oregonhunters.org

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Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire
RE: SB 769

Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Nash, Members of the Committee,

The Oregon Hunters Association (OHA) is Oregon's largest state-centric hunter conservation organization, representing over 12,000 sportsmen and women throughout 26 chapters in the state. Our mission is 'to protect Oregon's wildlife, habitat, and hunting heritage' and we strongly support science-based wildlife and habitat management.

The passage of Measure 18 in 1994, removed the ability to use hounds while pursuing cougars (*Puma concolor*) through a statewide ban. With the removal of this wildlife management tool, the cougar population has steadily increased to the current estimated population of 7,040, per a [September 2024 presentation](#) by Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW). By way of context, the minimum population threshold identified in the [2017 ODFW Cougar Management Plan](#) is 3,000 cougars.

As Oregon's cougar populations have risen, our prey species (e.g. deer, elk, bighorn sheep) are experiencing significant population declines. Habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation play an important role in animal nutrition and herd survivability however predation cannot be overlooked as a mortality factor. In a [four year study of mule deer](#) between 2014 and 2018, ODFW found that predation accounted for 55% of the mortalities.

Per [Clark et al. \(2014\)](#), ungulate species made up over 95% of cougar kills, equating to 1.03 ungulates killed per week. It was found that the diet of male cougars is roughly equal between deer and elk while female cougars predate mainly on deer at 74.6%. The same study found that cougars select for juvenile elk and deer, asserting that wildlife managers should consider the potential negative effects of cougars on ungulate populations in areas where juvenile recruitment has been chronically low. In a separate study, [Clark \(2014\)](#), cougars are shown to be a strong limiting factor for elk populations.

The results of a research project by ODFW and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service from 2004-2008 showed the primary driver for the population decline of the California bighorn sheep herd on the Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge was cougar predation. This drastic impact of predation has reduced that herd from 600 in 1992 to 300 in 2004 and, most recently, only 48 individuals in 2020. As such, the preferred management plan proposed in the [Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge Bighorn Sheep Management Plan \(2021\)](#) is a combination of habitat improvement and predator removal.

Predation, and specifically predation by cougars, has a strong impact on our prey species populations and without proper management of the predator species, we are allowing substantial, population-damaging impacts to occur.

It is widely acknowledged that the use of hounds when hunting cougars is the most effective means to harvest an animal. Without the use of hounds, it is extremely difficult to manage the cougar population through the usual means available to ODFW. Several steps have been made to increase cougar harvest such as a reduction in tag price, the addition of a second tag, and a year-round season. Despite these efforts to balance population numbers and benefit prey species, the success rate of hunters is miniscule. In 2023, 70,908 cougar tags were issued while the number of cougars harvested was 262, a success rate of 0.0037%.

Hunting with the use of hounds is a tool that wildlife managers can use to reduce cougar predation on ungulate populations at important times of year for prey species. With a methodical and scientific approach to season location, length and timing, hound hunting for cougars would likely improve the long term vital rates of mule deer, elk, and other prey species. It is ODFW's mission to protect and improve Oregon's fish, wildlife, and their habitats for current and future generations, which includes prey species.

As the human footprint grows in conjunction with the increasing cougar population, the prevalence of human-wildlife conflicts and human safety concerns grow. Incidents of cougars within urban populations is increasing at a steady pace:

- Gold Beach, May 2024: https://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2024/05_May/052024.asp
- Hillsboro, July 2024: <https://hillsboroherald.com/massive-cougar-spotted-in-se-hillsboro-on-ring-camera/>
- Newport docks, October 2024: https://www.newportnewstimes.com/news/cougar-spotted-on-newport-docks/article_1757a09a-90b6-11ef-8006-6f452f4b3bee.html
- Minto Brown Park, Salem, December 2024: <https://www.koin.com/news/oregon/salem-officials-warn-residents-after-confirmed-cougar-sighting-at-minto-brown-island-park/>
- Tillamook, January 2025: <https://www.koin.com/local/oregon-coast/police-address-unconfirmed-cougar-sightings-in-tillamook/>

As cougars become more desensitized to human presence, these incidents will continue to increase. Conversely, [Parsons et al \(2024\)](#) found that hunting and/or pursuing cougars with hounds can increase cougar sensitivity to humans and therefore reduce human-wildlife conflicts, particularly in the wildland-urban interface.

Many issues before this legislature may benefit humans but have the potential to negatively impact wildlife populations: housing development, transportation expansions, and renewable energy siting have all been identified as priorities for the legislative body. However, each of these issues increasingly pushes our wildlife populations into smaller areas with higher densities. As such, we are responsible for managing our wildlife as good stewards and responsible conservationists. It is irresponsible to manage only our prey species and not our predators; the equation must be balanced.

Cougar populations, prey species performance, and social acceptance of cougars related to their impacts on wildlife, livestock, and pets vary by region. Therefore, the regional solution in SB 769 is not only warranted but required to address these issues. Sustainable wildlife management must be regionally adaptive with appropriate wildlife management tools.

OHA supports SB 769 and its approach to restoring appropriate wildlife management tools in order to solve regionally specific problems while balancing the needs of all species on the landscape.

Thank you for your time,
Amy Patrick
OHA Policy Director