Submitter: Adam Williamson

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and
                                   Wildfire

Measure, Appointment or   SB769
       Topic:

Regarding SB 769:

It is vitally important that Oregon's wildlife resources be managed according to both sound science and the needs of local communities. While all wildlife has an important role in nature, some species like cougars do create conflict with both humans and other wildlife species. This conflict needs to be controlled so that excessive harm does not occur to people or other animal species.

The simple reality is that the US landscape has dramatically changed as a direct result of human expansion. While it is important to maintain a healthy population of predators like cougars (we do not want to see these magnificent animals become extinct), the landscape will no longer support the same number of predators that it once did without excessive interspecies conflict taking place. This conflict can be seen in the significant herd reduction of ungulate species such as deer and elk (which are a valuable food resource to many humans), the increased predation on livestock/domestic animals as wildlife prey species are reduced, and increased attacks on humans (while still rare, attacks on humans by cougars have increased in recent decades in the pacific northwest at the same time that we have seen cougar numbers rise).

These conflicts are not necessary to the degree that we are seeing. Healthy cougar populations can be maintained at lower densities that do not have such a negative impact on the aforementioned areas of concern. However, there has to be an effective control mechanism in place to keep cougar populations in check. An abundance of scientific and historical evidence demonstrates that using dogs to hunt cougars is a more successful method of controlling their numbers. Moreover, this more efficient method also allows for a more selective harvest that better balances which animals are taken (males, females, juveniles, etc.). Rather than harvesting cougars primarily through chance encounters, specific animals can be targeted in a way that controls overall population while still protecting the cougar as a species under the management of ODFW. This course of action is the obvious one that we must take. Managing wildlife in a manner that arbitrarily and unnecessarily inflates cougar populations without regard for the impact of such high predator densities on people and other animal species simply does not make sense.

The interspecies conflict that occurs when cougar numbers are artificially kept higher than needed disproportionately impacts people that live in and directly utilize

resources in rural and forested areas (farmers, ranchers, hunters, etc.). Members of rural communities who are most impacted need to have more of a voice over how cougar populations are managed. All too often, residents of urban environments (in locations largely unaffected by the presence of cougars) have a disproportionate influence over how conflicts with cougars can be addressed. This is quite ironic considering that everyone living in a major city or urban area directly benefits from the complete and total displacement of cougar populations in those areas. They would never advocate returning cougars to their historical habitat that has been replaced with suburbs, high rises, schools, and coffee shops, and yet still insist that rural communities must tolerate excessive conflict from the same species they would not welcome into their own backyards. It is as if some citizens are expected to just accept excessive degrees of predator conflict that other citizens can safely exempt themselves from.

This is why I support giving local communities greater ability to make decisions about how cougar populations need to be controlled in their own backyards. They are the ones actually living with cougars, and their way of life deserves to be protected just as much as those who have chosen a more urban lifestyle.

Let the local communities make their own decisions about this.

Thank you for your consideration.

Adam Williamson