

Submitter: Chelsea Cassens  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and  
Wildfire  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB769

I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 769, which would allow counties to make informed decisions about the use of dogs in cougar hunting through a democratic process. This bill respects the autonomy of local communities by allowing them to decide for themselves whether to adopt this method of wildlife management, provided they gain the approval of voters.

As a mother of young, active children who spend a lot of time outdoors, I am deeply concerned about the increasing safety risks associated with the growing cougar population in Eastern Oregon. My children are avid hikers, campers, hunters, rafters, and explorers. We love being outdoors, but in recent years, I have noticed a heightened sense of unease, within myself, when we are out exploring our public lands. Despite all the beauty, peace, and opportunities the outdoors offers, I am now more cautious and aware of the risks posed by wildlife predators, particularly cougars.

Cougars, once a rare sight in some areas, have become a more frequent with increased sightings. As their populations increase, it is harder to feel secure when enjoying outdoor activities in our rural communities. The reality of cougar sightings near residential areas, parks, and trails has also become more prevalent in some communities as well. This growing threat underscores the need for a proactive approach to wildlife management. Senate Bill 769 is an opportunity to give local communities the ability to address these concerns through a democratic process that reflects our needs while also ensuring responsible wildlife management.

Beyond safety, there is an urgent environmental concern. The mule deer population in Oregon, especially in our area, is in rapid decline due to a variety of factors, with cougar predation being a leading cause. This has ripple effects across the ecosystem, impacting not just the deer but other ungulates like elk and bighorn sheep. We are already seeing a decline in these populations, and something needs to be done to restore balance to the landscape. The use of dogs to track and hunt cougars, as outlined in SB 769, can help manage cougar numbers and protect our native ungulates, which are essential to the overall health of our environment.

I would also like to take a moment to highlight the sportsmanship and dedication of the individuals who utilize dogs in hunting. These sportsmen and women are hardworking, responsible, and deeply committed to both ethical hunting practices and conservation efforts. They approach hunting with a strong sense of respect for wildlife

and the land, and they often spend long hours working with their dogs to ensure that their efforts are in line with sound ecological principles. These hunters are not only passionate about preserving the outdoors for future generations but also contribute to local economies and communities. They are some of the most kind-hearted, dedicated individuals I have encountered, and their contributions to wildlife management cannot be overstated.

This bill provides a clear, democratic process for counties to decide whether to exempt themselves from the current restrictions on cougar hunting using dogs. Importantly, it ensures that the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission retains oversight, ensuring that any measures taken are in line with state wildlife management regulations.

Allowing counties to vote on this matter is a responsible approach that empowers local communities to make decisions based on their unique challenges and priorities. It is essential that we have the ability to make informed decisions about our own safety and the preservation of our local ecosystems. By passing Senate Bill 769, we can take action to protect our children, our wildlife, and our way of life.

I urge the committee to pass Senate Bill 769, supporting local decision-making, enhances public participation, and allows counties to better manage cougar populations where necessary.

Thank you for your consideration.