



Senator Jeff Golden, Chair

Senator Todd Nash, Vice Chair

Members of the Senate Natural Resources and Wildfire Committee

The Association of Oregon Counties offers this letter in **support of Senate Bill 769.**

SB 769, if passed, would allow a county the ability to place on the ballot, either by initiative petition or as an act of the governing body, a ballot measure for approval on whether to allow the hunting of cougars with hounds. If passed, the county would notify Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife of this exemption. ODFW would still have the authority to manage cougars in the county under all existing wildlife laws.

In 1994 the people of Oregon passed Ballot Measure 18 which removed the ability to use hounds when pursuing cougars. Since that time, it has become increasingly harder to hunt and manage the species in the state. Oregon's Department of Fish and Wildlife stated in the Cougar Management Plan the minimum population needed in the state was 3,000; however, in the most recent 2024 cougar population estimate, the total number of cougars was over 7,000.

Senate Bill 769 would help play a role in rectifying this overpopulation of the species. Wildlife can cause significant damage to public infrastructure, private property, and more. Due to the impacts wildlife cause, communities rely on the county to provide services related to predator and wildlife control. Regarding cougars and other predatory species however, the potential impact to public safety is extremely high. Earlier this month, Baker County had a cougar within the city limits of Baker city which local law enforcement had to deal with due to its impact on public safety. In 2018, a cougar had to be euthanized in The Dalles when it was found inside a room at a downtown hotel.

At the same time Oregon works to increase their housing numbers to solve the housing emergency, development will inevitably expand into unincorporated areas of the county or into the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). As development occurs in these areas, more wildlife interactions will occur.

Senate Bill 769 will provide counties with one more tool in the toolbox in addressing predator management within their jurisdictional boundaries.

AOC encourages the committee's support of Senate Bill 769

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