THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

February 12, 2025

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire
900 Court St. NE
Salem Oregon 97301

RE: Written Testimony Opposing SB 769

On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States and our members and supporters in Oregon, we urge you not to move Senate Bill 769, as it would undercut the will of Oregon voters, create a confusing, patchwork approach to wildlife management, contradict science-based wildlife conservation, and cause harm to wildlife and communities across Oregon. Legislation to expand trophy hunting of Oregon's cougars, including with the use of hounds, is cruel and unnecessary. Trophy hunting cougars with hounds does not reduce conflicts, and research consistently shows that trophy hunting and predator control of cougars exacerbates human, pet, and livestock conflicts. Killing cougars will not help deer and elk populations, and hound hunting will likely harm these populations, as well as come into conflict with outdoor recreationists, livestock, and private landowners.

1. **Oregon voters don't support hound hunting of cougars.**

Oregon voters have stated twice that they oppose the use of hounds to hunt cougars for sport, or "trophy hunting,"[1] because it is cruel and violates the ethics of fair chase. A majority of Oregonians passed Measure 18 in 1994, making illegal the hunting of cougars with packs of radio-collared dogs ("hounding"). Measure 18 was a ban statewide and did not include an option for counties to "opt out" of prohibition of hounding and baiting. An even greater majority voted in 1996 to reject a measure to repeal Measure 18. Moreover, recent polling shows that the majority of voters, 65 percent, are opposed to the trophy hunting of Oregon's majestic cougars.[2]

Measure 18, now Oregon Revised Statute 498.164, already provides exemptions for agency personnel, landowners, and their agents to use of dogs to address threats from individual cougars who threaten property or public safety, or to carry out state wildlife management objectives. Oregonians across the state have made it clear that allowing the *public* to use hounds to indiscriminately hunt cougars – for sport, trophies, or to kill more cougars – is not a practice that belongs in the state.

2. **Cougar hunting is already excessive in Oregon.**

Oregon currently allows excessive trophy hunting of cougars and ranks fifth highest nationwide for hunting mortality of these large cats. Between 2008 and 2017, trophy hunters killed nearly 2,600 cougars.[3] Oregon is one of only a few states that allow year-round hunting of cougars, even when kittens are likely dependent on their mothers. This contradicts the common practice of ending hunting during peak birthing months so as to avoid orphaning kittens, as Washington, Montana, and Idaho do. **Cougars are the only game mammal is Oregon that can be killed 365 days a year.**

Measure 18 did not ban trophy hunting of cougars in Oregon, in fact, further actions have been taken by ODFW and the legislature to liberalize the killing of cougars, including the passage of a bill in 2001 that

clarified that it was legal to kill a cougar or bear "that poses a threat to human safety" – including simply being seen in the daylight or near a structure. ODFW has reduced the cougar tag fee from $50 to $16; doubled the cougar quotas and tag limit for hunters; and revised the Cougar Management Plan to allow hunters and agents to use hounds and other methods to kill and reduce the estimated population of cougars in so-called "target areas."[4]

There are already ample opportunities for hunters and tools in the toolbox for cougar management in Oregon. The current level of excessive killing of cougars is likely causing an increase in conflicts, and efforts should be made to stabilize cougar populations, not kill more.

3. **Killing cougars *worsens* conflicts with livestock and communities as it destabilizes cougar social structures.**

A Washington state study shows that as mountain lion complaints increased, wildlife officials lengthened seasons and increased quotas to respond to what they believed was a growing lion population. However, the public's perception of an increasing population and greater number of livestock depredations was actually the result of a declining female and increasing male population.[5] Heavy hunting of mountain lions resulted in the resident adults being killed, who would normally defend their territory from dispersing young animals. When those older cougars are killed, it leaves a vacuum for young, inexperienced cougars – who are more likely to target livestock and be seen near communities – to move into the vacant territory. Thus, conflicts increased, while the population density didn't change, it just started skewing toward younger, less experienced cougars.[6] Please see written testimony submitted by Dr. Robert Wielgus regarding this research.

Study authors found that the trophy hunting of mountain lions to reduce complaints and livestock losses had the opposite effect. Peebles et al. (2013) write:

> . . . each additional cougar [i.e. mountain lion] on the landscape increased the odds of a complaint of livestock depredation by about 5%. However, contrary to expectations, each additional cougar killed on the landscape increased the odds by about 50%, or an order of magnitude higher. By far, hunting of cougars had the greatest effects, but not as expected. Very heavy hunting (100% removal of resident adults in 1 year) increased the odds of complaints and depredations in year 2 by 150% to 340%.[7]

Similarly, a study published recently shows the very same result – lethal removal of mountain lions is associated with increased conflicts, especially on small hoofstock including sheep and goats, and authors suggest maintaining an older age structure of cougars to mitigate conflicts.[8]

4. **Killing cougars with hounds will not help, and will likely harm, deer and elk populations.**

Lethal predator control has been repeatedly shown to be ineffective – specifically, killing cougars with hounds in Oregon has been ineffective in boosting mule deer populations. For example, between 2009 and 2017, ODFW's cougar reduction efforts – utilizing hound hunting – in seven "target areas" across six Wildlife Management Units resulted in **no measurable improvements** to mule deer populations.

Scientific research consistently shows that killing native carnivores to increase ungulate populations is unlikely to be successful. A review of decades of predator control studies found that lethal removal actions generally have no long-term effects.[9] In both Idaho and Colorado, efforts to remove coyotes and cougars did not lead to significant increases in mule deer numbers.[10] In Alberta, despite growing populations of grizzly bears, wolves, and cougars, elk hunter success continued to rise, suggesting that the presence of carnivores doesn't limit elk populations.[11] Because ecological systems are complex, heavily persecuting mountain lions will fail to address the underlying malnutrition problems that deer face. Research also shows that disruption by oil and gas drilling does, in fact, greatly harm mule deer populations.[12]

Persecuting mountain lions will not help bighorn sheep recruitment, either. Sawyer and Lindzey (2002) surveyed more than 60 peer-reviewed articles concerning predator-prey relationships involving bighorn sheep and mountain lions, concluding that while predator control is often politically expedient, it often does not address underlying environmental issues including habitat loss, loss of migration corridors, and inadequate nutrition.[13]

Carnivores play an essential role in managing diseases like chronic wasting disease (CWD) and brucellosis by targeting the weakest members of prey populations.[14] A recent study found that cougars are the best carnivore for targeting animals with CWD.[15] Mule deer in Oregon have also recently been impacted by adenovirus hemorrhagic disease (AHD), which spreads more quickly during droughts as deer are forced to gather near water sources.[16] Alongside this, diseases like bluetongue and epizootic hemorrhagic disease virus also threaten the health of mule deer in the state.[17] Killing more cougars compromises a powerful tool in controlling these diseases.[18]

5. Hound hunting is harmful to mountain lions, hounds, non-target wildlife, and bystanders.

Using radio-collared trailing hounds to chase mountain lions and bay them into trees or rock ledges so a trophy hunter can shoot them at close range is unsporting, unethical and inhumane.[19] Hounds kill kittens, and mountain lions often injure or kill hounds.[20] The practice is exceedingly stressful and energetically taxing to mountain lions.[21] A 3.5-minute chase, according to Bryce et al. (2017), likely equaled 18 minutes of energy the mountain lion would have expended on hunting activities necessary to find prey.[22]

Hounding is not considered "fair chase" hunting by most.[23] Fair chase hunting is predicated upon giving the animal an equal opportunity to escape from the hunter.[24] The use of hounds provides an unfair advantage to trophy hunters who rely on hounds to do the bulk of the work in finding and baying a mountain lion. In Custer State Park in South Dakota, hunters relying on hounds experienced an astounding 63% success rate in killing mountain lions, compared to a success rate of 3.5% for boot hunters.[25] Hounds also chase and stress non-target wildlife, from porcupines to deer,[26] cause adverse interactions with bystanders and livestock, and trespass onto private lands.[27]

Grignolio et al. (2011) found that hounding was highly costly to non-target deer. Hounding changed deer behaviors, including deer inside a protected refuge.[28] While the hounds were chasing other species, they caused non-target deer, especially younger animals, to panic and huddle in an inferior habitat (in this case: a protected, high-elevation, snow-covered reserve during the wintertime hunting season when foraging was difficult). Hounds also significantly increased deer home range sizes—meaning deer had to expend extra energy to distance themselves from the hounds. Furthermore, Grignolio et al. (2011), citing several others,

indicated that hounding highly disturbs deer, likely reducing individual fitness and reproductive success while harming deer populations on the whole. It is widely acknowledged that unrestrained dogs cause stress to ungulates. In a March 2019 news release, ODFW discouraged shed hunting and other activities during the late winter, stating quote, "Being forced to make extra movements in response to dog, vehicle or human disturbance weakens [deer and elk] further, using up what little energy they have left."[29] If our conservation goals include conserving deer populations, then unleashing packs of loose dogs in their habitat to spook, harass, and chase wildlife during a sensitive time of the year is quite counter to that goal.

Please oppose SB 769 in order to respect the clear wishes of Oregon voters, prevent conflicts with wildlife in our communities, and maintain the health of our wildlife populations.

Sincerely,

Story Warren
Program Manager, Wildlife Protection
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[1] The Humane Society of the United States defines trophy hunting as the practice of killing or pursuing with intent to kill animals to display their body parts, not primarily for subsistence.
[2] Remington Research Group. Poll conducted January 2019.
[3] Data received on June 28, 2018 through records request from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.
[4] Oregon Cougar Management Plan, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (2017) https://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/cougar/docs/2017_Oregon_Cougar_Management_Plan.pdf
[5] Peebles et al., "Effects of Remedial Sport Hunting on Cougar Complaints and Livestock Depredations.", citing Lambert et al. 2006 and Robinson et al. 2008
[6] Teichman, Cristescu, and Darimont, "Hunting as a Management Tool? Cougar-Human Conflict Is Positively Related to Trophy Hunting."
[7] Peebles et al., p.6
[8] Dellinger et al., "Temporal Trends and Drivers of Mountain Lion Depredation in California, USA ".
[9] Clark, T. J., and Mark Hebblewhite. "Predator Control May Not Increase Ungulate Populations in the Future: A Formal Meta-Analysis." Journal of Applied Ecology 58, no. 4 (2021): 812-24. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/1365-2664.13810; Forrester and Wittmer, "A Review of the Population Dynamics of Mule Deer and Black-Tailed Deer Odocoileus Hemionus in North America.", p. 300, Lennox et al., "Evaluating the Efficacy of Predator Removal in a Conflict-Prone World."
[10] M. A. Hurley et al., "Demographic Response of Mule Deer to Experimental Reduction of Coyotes and Mountain Lions in Southeastern Idaho," ibid., no. 178 (2011); C. J. Bishop et al., "Effect of Enhanced Nutrition on Mule Deer Population Rate of Change," Wildlife Monographs, no. 172 (2009);
[11] Trump, T. , K. Knopff, A. Morehouse, and M. Boyce. "Sustainable Elk Harvests in Alberta with Increasing Predator Populations." PLoS ONE 17, no. 10 (2022) https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0269407;
[12] Hall Sawyer et al., "Mule Deer and Energy Development—Long-Term Trends of Habituation and Abundance," *Global Change Biology* (2017). Heather E. Johnson et al., "Increases in Residential and Energy Development Are Associated with Reductions in Recruitment for a Large Ungulate," ibid. (2016).
[13] Hall Sawyer and Frederick Lindzey, "Review of Predation on Bighorn Sheep (Ovis Canadensis)," *Prepared for Wyoming Animal Damage Management Board, Wyoming Domestic Sheep and Bighorn Sheep Interaction Working Group, Wyoming Game and Fish Department.* (2002).
[14] Ellen E. Brandell et al., "Examination of the Interaction between Age-Specific Predation and Chronic Disease in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem," *Journal of Animal Ecology* (2022); C. E. Krumm et al., "Mountain Lions Prey Selectively on Prion-Infected Mule Deer," *Biology Letters* 6, no. 2 (2009). ; Escobar LE, Pritzkow S, Winter SN, Grear DA, Kirchgessner MS, Dominguez-Villegas E, Machado G, Townsend Peterson A, Soto C. The ecology of chronic wasting disease in wildlife. Biol Rev

Camb Philos Soc. 2020 Apr;95(2):393-408. doi: 10.1111/brv.12568. Epub 2019 Nov 21. PMID: 31750623; PMCID: PMC7085120; Barrile, G. M., Cross, P. C., Stewart, C., Malmberg, J., Jakopak, R. P., Binfet, J., Monteith, K. L., Werner, B., Jennings-Gaines, J., & Merkle, J. A. (2024). Chronic wasting disease alters the movement behavior and habitat use of mule deer during clinical stages of infection. *Ecology and Evolution*, 14, e11418. https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.11418. Hobbs, N. T. (2006). A model analysis of effects of wolf predation on prevalence of chronic wasting disease in elk populations of Rocky Mountain National Park. *Report submitted to the National Park Service.*Wild, M. A., Hobbs, N. T., Graham, M. S., & Miller, M. W. (2011).

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[16] https://www.centraloregondaily.com/archives/central-oregon-daily/adenovirus-hemorrhagic-disease-suspected-in-some-dead-madras-mule-deer/article_482e5732-a1ee-5648-a9ff-5ce99c23736c.html; Oregon's Mule Deer Management Plan (2024), Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/management_plans/mule_deer/2024_Mule_Deer_Management_Plan_Final_14_June_24.pdf

[17] Oregon Mule Deer Management Plan (2024), Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/management_plans/mule_deer/2024_Mule_Deer_Management_Plan_Final_14_June_24.pdf

[18] Ellen E. Brandell et al., "Examination of the Interaction between Age-Specific Predation and Chronic Disease in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem," *Journal of Animal Ecology* (2022); C. E. Krumm et al., "Mountain Lions Prey Selectively on Prion-Infected Mule Deer," *Biology Letters* 6, no. 2 (2009). ; Escobar LE, Pritzkow S, Winter SN, Grear DA, Kirchgessner MS, Dominguez-Villegas E, Machado G, Townsend Peterson A, Soto C. The ecology of chronic wasting disease in wildlife. Biol Rev Camb Philos Soc. 2020 Apr;95(2):393-408. doi: 10.1111/brv.12568. Epub 2019 Nov 21. PMID: 31750623; PMCID: PMC7085120; Barrile, G. M., Cross, P. C., Stewart, C., Malmberg, J., Jakopak, R. P., Binfet, J., Monteith, K. L., Werner, B., Jennings-Gaines, J., & Merkle, J. A. (2024). Chronic wasting disease alters the movement behavior and habitat use of mule deer during clinical stages of infection. *Ecology and Evolution*, 14, e11418. https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.11418. Hobbs, N. T. (2006). A model analysis of effects of wolf predation on prevalence of chronic wasting disease in elk populations of Rocky Mountain National Park. *Report submitted to the National Park Service.*Wild, M. A., Hobbs, N. T., Graham, M. S., & Miller, M. W. (2011). The role of predation in disease control: a comparison

[19] Teel et al., "Utah Stakeholders' Attitudes toward Selected Cougar and Black Bear Management Practices."

[20] Lindzey et al., "Cougar Population Response to Manipulation in Southern Utah."; Logan and Sweanor, *Desert Puma: Evolutionary Ecology and Conservation of an Enduring Carnivore*; Elbroch et al., "Trailing Hounds Vs Foot Snares: Comparing Injuries to Pumas Puma Concolor Captured in Chilean Patagonia."

[21] Harlow et al., "Stress Response of Cougars to Nonlethal Pursuit by Hunters."; Bryce, Wilmers, and Williams, "Energetics and Evasion Dynamics of Large Predators and Prey: Pumas Vs. Hounds."; Bonier, Quigley, and Austad, "A Technique for Non-Invasively Detecting Stress Response in Cougars."

[22] Ibid.

[23] Posewitz, *Beyond Fair Chase: The Ethic and Tradition of Hunting*; Teel, Krannich, and Schmidt, "Utah Stakeholders' Attitudes toward Selected Cougar and Black Bear Management Practices."; Cougar Management Guidelines, *Cougar Management Guidelines.*

[24] Posewitz, *Beyond Fair Chase: The Ethic and Tradition of Hunting.*

[25] GAME, FISH, AND PARKS COMMISSION ACTION PROPOSAL, Mountain Lion Hunting Season Chapter 41:06:61, Commission Meeting July 20, 2023 Chamberlain, South Dakota. https://gfp.sd.gov/UserDocs/nav/PRO_2023_Mountain_Lion_BHdogs.pdf

[26] Grignolio et al., "Effects of Hunting with Hounds on a Non-Target Species Living on the Edge of a Protected Area."; Mori, "Porcupines in the Landscape of Fear: Effect of Hunting with Dogs on the Behaviour of a Non-Target Species."

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