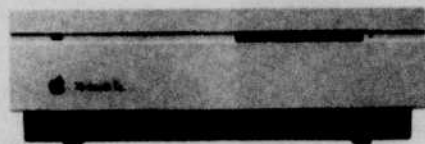


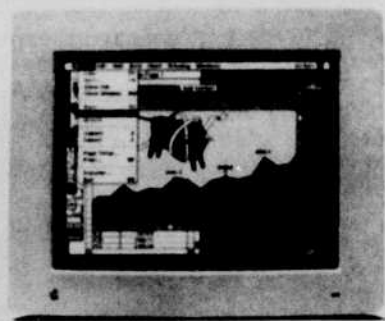
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UNIVERSITY



Photo by Andre Raineri

A cougar attends a recent University press conference where activists outlined plans to stop hunters from killing the creatures.

Lawsuit combats cougar killings

By Tammy Batey
Emerald Reporter

The beauty of the untamed cougar may be threatened by hunters, and some animal rights activist groups say they are not going to stand for it.

Among these groups is the Northwest Cougar Action Trust (Northwest CATS), is pressing its point all the way to the courts.

Northwest CATS and other organizations have tried to force the U.S. Forest Service to drop its support for commercial cougar hunting. The groups filed a lawsuit against the Forest Service in Nov. 1989.

Their most recent efforts have included a request to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for an injunction banning this year's scheduled hunts on several of Oregon's national forests.

At a University press conference, which Eugene attorney David Atkin, representing the animal rights groups, explained that legal efforts are intended to bring about a change.

"The long years of indifference and hatred toward cougars are coming to an end. Cougars cannot be seen as merely trophy pieces. Without these creatures, America itself is diminished," Atkin said.

"Groups that have filed want to force the Forest Service to look at the status of the cougar population before allowing cougar hunting in forests."

The Forest Service is required to survey the cougar population, but have not, Atkin said.

"We believe, when the actual figures are brought to life, the Forest Service will reform cougar hunting. Right now they're using voodoo

biology. The Forest Service does not know age distribution of cougars or other information, but they keep taking a guess," Atkin said.

The Forest Service presumes that because more cougars are seen dead every year, the number of cougars has increased, Atkin said. But the increase is because cougars are being driven out of their natural habitat.

Catherine Koehn, executive director of Northwest CATS, hopes the lawsuit will press the government to take action. The Forest Service refused to look at recent input, Koehn said.

"Slightly more than 450 kill tags were issued, according to statistics. The average age of the cougars killed was 2.7, which is a low age before sexual maturity. (The hunters) are killing them when they're unable to reproduce," Koehn said. "I hope that our federal government is more aware of this worldwide crisis."

Part of the problem is no one can track how many cougars are illegally killed by poachers, said Mike Axline, University law school professor.

"Hunters from California and other states come and have their way on federal grounds in Oregon," Axline said.

The Forest Service has the unfortunate habit of management under crisis, Axline said. However, action must come before it is too late.

"Commercial hunting may be the straw that breaks the cougar's back. We're out to stop that," Axline said.

Hunters send their dogs out, using radio collars to track them. The dogs tree cougars, where hunters find and shoot the exhausted prey, Atkins said.

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