

Cougar renews interest in Wildlife Service trappers

ASSOCIATED PRESS

GOLD HILL, Ore. — Residents of this Southern Oregon town have had it with the cougar.

Last month, Reba, one of Chris Catania's dogs, was gored after the cougar jumped a 4-foot fence leading into the house's backyard. Other residents have had their livestock attacked. Many are afraid to let their animals out.

"Reba's scared to death to go outside," said Chris Catania. "I'm scared."

Twelve years ago, residents could have called on a "government trapper." But the trappers were eliminated amid budget cuts. Now, the cougar's confrontation with residents has rekindled interest in the program.

Residents say Wildlife Services trappers could do what landowners have so far been unable to: track the offending cougar and get rid of it.

Whereas Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologists do not have the resources to remove pet-killing cougars, state hunting laws ban houndsmen from using dogs to chase cougars as part of the hunting season. Hunters can only chase cougars that cause damage on private land where the damage occurred. They can cross

into adjacent private lands only with written permission.

By contrast, Wildlife Services agents can be authorized to chase the cougar with dogs on public lands. They also rely on an arsenal of traps to target specific animals.

A full-time agent costs around \$60,000 a year for the county, a price that 24 of 36 Oregon counties have opted to pay.

"We are the agents of the state to deal with wildlife damage of all types," says Wildlife Services State Director Dave Williams. "That's the full-time job of our people. We're on call, 24-7."

Shayne Maxwell, a Gold Hill resident, says that's what's needed here. She has documented the death of a dozen pets and livestock in the surrounding area from one or more cougars in the past three months.

Area landowners have tried to kill the cougar themselves, and at least two houndsmen have been hired to tree and kill the cougar, Maxwell said.

One neighbor wears a side-arm just to mow his lawn. And others have stopped jogging until the offending cougar or cougars are found and killed.

"Right now, I'm the one trying to figure out the patterns of this cat," Maxwell says. "It shouldn't be me doing it. It should be a professional."

"I have serious concerns about our health and safety," Maxwell says. "Does someone have to die before it gets the attention it needs?"

But Brooks Fahy, from the group Predator Defense in Eugene, says the actions of the offending cougar are "no excuse" to contract with Wildlife Services. She likens it to using "a nuclear bomb instead of a .22-caliber bullet."

"It sounds like that animal needs to be taken out," Fahy says. "But that doesn't mean you need a whole government-funded program."

Williams says Wildlife Services agents in 2004 logged more than 500 deaths of livestock and pets as a result of cougars. Agents killed a total of 70 cats.

Fahy, a longtime Wildlife Services critic, says other counties with Wildlife Services contracts end up with pets lost to coyote traps and poisons.

"Get ready, county, because you're going to lose more dogs to Wildlife Services than to cougars, period," Fahy said.



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IN BRIEF

Forest Service removes protesters' log cabin

GALICE, Ore. — A log cabin erected by protesters trying to block logging on a timber sale in southwestern Oregon was removed by logger and U.S. Forest Service officials.

Using equipment provided by the loggers, including a skidder and a front-end loader, the Forest Service pushed the logs to one side on

Sunday, said Forest Service spokesman Tom Lavagnino.

The cabin was erected this past weekend in the middle of the only road leading to the Hobson timber sale in the Siskiyou National Forest, one of the areas burned in the 2002 Biscuit fire, according to Wild Siskiyou Action, the group that undertook the protest.

Loggers alerted the Forest Service when they realized they could not get by the cabin.

About 40 protesters went out to

the site on Sunday afternoon, according to Laurel Sutherland, a spokesman for the activists.

The salvage sale covers 577 acres located on the Galice Ranger District.

Salvage logging on the 2002 Biscuit fire has been the focus of a debate between conservationists and the Bush administration over how to treat the millions of acres of national forest that burn every year in wildfires and whether to log any of the remaining old growth in national forests.

—The Associated Press

Park: Association plans cleanup project

Continued from page 1

the operation was supposed to be elected at the meeting. Such a committee was not established, but the West University Neighbors will discuss it further at the next meeting.

"We just want to come up with something good for the park," said Drix Rixmann, chairman of the West University Neighbors.

After two hours of playing Frisbee, eating, drinking, socializing and getting to know fellow neighbors and community members, Rixmann began the formal meeting. An agenda was written by the attendees with ideas for possible uses of the park. The agenda included holding a monthly or weekly oratory, movie night or musician festival; planting a community garden; opening it up to play disk golf or basketball; installing chess tables, a swing set, a fountain, Japanese garden or announcement board; making a horse-shoe pit; buying a community lawn mower; building a small stage; and holding scheduled block parties.

Rixmann asked for a show of hands for those in support of reopening the

park, those opposed and those who abstain. The attendees unanimously voted for reopening the park.

The first step looks to be a community cleanup project, where neighbors and community members could come to the park and make the park presentable before proposals for reopening the park are submitted to the city.

Board member Craig Laupheimer suggested fixing the lights and inviting people to stomp down the shin-high grass while they celebrated.

"Nothing crazy is necessary," Laupheimer said. "We should just do something. And if it wasn't so dark it would be a lot safer."

Attendees debated about short versus long-term plans for reopening and rebuilding the park. Many thought it could be reopened as early as September, while others said that considering the preferred involvement from neighbors and local businesses, it could take longer.

Community activist Zach Vishanoff suggested delivering information door-to-door to neighbors and requesting their feedback, ideas and concerns.

Because the park is "open space" where people can be outside and see the sky, Rixmann said it is an attractive place for the city. "We don't want it to be turned over to developers," Rixmann said.

Plans were set for a meeting in which anyone interested in the future of West University Neighborhood Park could attend and contribute to the proposals that will be submitted to the City of Eugene.

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MONTHLY MEETINGS

Central Presbyterian Church
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WUN Online Discussion Group
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/west_university_neighbors/ via www.drix.org

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