



PREDATOR DEFENSE

# Cougar Kill

Will Oregon hound cougars to death? By Camilla Mortensen

**F**or not much more than the price of a couple of six-packs, Oregon hunters can carry a tag that lets them shoot a cougar if they happen to come upon one while out stalking big game. It used to cost \$50 to hunt a cougar, but the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) dropped the price to \$10 and added the cougar tag to the popular hunting "SportsPac."

And thanks to a bill recently signed by Gov. Ted Kulongoski, if hunters are "selected, trained and supervised" by the ODFW, they can be deputized as agents of the ODFW and hunt cougars using dogs. Critics say this could effectively overturn Measure 18, which ended the hounding of cougars in Oregon in 1994.

Local predator advocate Brooks Fahy has a big problem with the new law and with the way cougars have been managed in Oregon. Hunting with hounds, despite the efforts of the powerful hunting lobby, is not a solution to cougar management, he says, and the dangers of cougars to humans are greatly exaggerated.

Scientists divide cats (Felidae) into two groups: *Panthera*, or the roaring cats such as lions and tigers, and *Felis*, or the purring cats.

The cougar is the largest of the purring cats.

The big cat *felis concolor* that is known as a cougar in Oregon is found throughout North America in a variety of different subspecies and called by many names. It goes by the name mountain lion in the Pacific Northwest and puma across the nation. The same predator is dubbed catamount (for cat of the mountains) in the Northeast and painter east of the Mississippi. Known as the panther in Florida, it is an endangered species in that state.

Oregon's subspecies is called *felis concolor oregonensis*, though at least two other subspecies live in southern Oregon.

The SportsPac, which is a combination hunting and angling deal for licenses and tags, has been quite successful in allowing hunters to trophy hunt Oregon's cougars. Record numbers of cougars have been shot by hunters in the past several years, according to ODFW's website. ODFW sold almost 39,000 cougar hunting tags last year.

ODFW estimates there are about 5,000 cougars in Oregon. In 2006 442 cougars were killed in this state. "Hunter kill" accounts for 284 deaths and "damage kill," which refers to killing in response to cougar attacks on livestock, accounts for 103 deaths; 25 cougars were killed for "human safety." The human safety kill is in response to perceived threats to humans and/or pets. If "cougar or cougar sign has been observed in close proximity" to pets or populated areas, that is cause for a human safety complaint, according to Michelle Dennehy of ODFW. Thirty cougars were killed through poaching and car accidents or simply found dead.

ODFW received 446 cougar complaints in 2006. In 1999 ODFW recorded one of the highest years with 1,072 calls. There has never been a report of a cougar-related death in Oregon.

Mike Green of Brownsville disputes that statistic. In a 7-15 letter to the *Register-Guard*, he writes, "I would suggest that there have been a lot of humans that disappeared in the wilderness, never to be seen again. Cougars always hide their prey after killing it."

For predator advocate Brooks Fahy, such anti-cougar hype is "ridiculous," and the numbers of cougars killed are too high. In fact, he says, "I would love to see a complete moratorium on the hunting of cougars."

## Predator Defense

Brooks Fahy has been working to save cougars and other native predators in Oregon for almost 20 years. In 1990 he started Cascade Wildlife Rescue, which rescued and rehabilitated bears, bobcats, cougars, coyotes and foxes. Through the rescue, Fahy worked hands-on to save predators from injury and death.

The rescue closed its doors in 1995 in order to become Predator Defense and focus energy on advocating for cougars, coyotes, bears and other predators. "It was disheartening," said Fahy, "saving an animal to release it to be shot by a hunter."

Predators were also being killed by leg hold traps, poisons, snares and aerial gunning. Fahy decided the group needed to focus on legislation.

Predator Defense has been instrumental in ending the aerial gunning of wolves in Alaska (a practice that recently restarted) and calling attention to the poisons left out for predators that instead kill family pets and even sicken people.

Fahy still goes out on predator calls any time of day or night. His passion for protecting predators is palpable. If anyone could save Oregon's cougars on energy and excitement

alone, it would be Brooks Fahy.

Fahy recently appeared on Oregon Public Broadcasting's "Oregon Field Guide" discussing the cougar in Oregon. Back during his rescue days, Fahy says, Disney producers "for about a year were trying to turn me into a nature celebrity type." And with an excitement about predators that rivals the now-deceased Crocodile Hunter's glee over reptiles, it's easy to see why. He's Oregon's own Predator Man.

## Cougar Legislation

In 1994 Fahy's group campaigned for the passage of the controversial Measure 18 that ended the hunting of cougars and bears with hounds as well as hunting bears with bait. Oregon voters passed the bill only four years after voters in California voted to permanently ban all sport hunting of cougars there.

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California actually hasn't had sport hunting of cougars for over 30 years. In 1972 then-governor Ronald Reagan signed a five-year ban on the sport hunting of cougars. This ban was extended twice, and then legal battles prevented hunts until California voters permanently put an end to the trophy hunts.

Oregon's measure didn't stop all sport hunting of cougars, nor did it stop hound hunting. In this state, hunting bobcats and other predators with hounds remained legal.

Ballot Measure 34 in 1996 attempted to reinstate hunting cougars with hounds. Oregonians voted it down. In fact, in every legislative year since Measure 18 was enacted, attempts have been made to overturn or weaken the measure. None have been successful until now.

In 2005 ODFW developed a "cougar management plan" that, according to wildlife ecologist Rick Hopkins, did not rely on the "best available science." Hopkins wrote in his comments on the plan that it "focused almost entirely on the reduction of cougars to reduce 'perceived' conflicts with humans."

HB 2971, signed into law on June 27 of this year by Kulongoski, repealed the protections created by Measure 18. Cougars and bears can now once again be hunted with hounds in Oregon by agents of the ODFW. Who those agents will be is unclear.

The governor signed the bill the same afternoon Fahy and Hopkins met with the governor's natural resources policy director Mike Carrier to try to persuade the governor to use his veto power on the bill. Sen. Floyd Prozanski, who was opposed to the bill, also attended the meeting.

*EW* called Kulongoski's office to ask why the governor would sign legislation into law that's contrary to two state-wide votes. The governor's office did not respond.

According to Dennehy of the ODFW, it was the Oregon Hunters Association (OHA) that was behind the legislation. She says HB 2971 "was not ODFW's bill."

"This isn't about hunting. This is about the ODFW removing problem cougars," says Duane Dungannon of the OHA.

## On the Cover

This photo, courtesy of Predator Defense, features the severed heads of 11 cougars killed on federal land in Arizona. The heads were used as a data sample for the Arizona Department of Fish and Game (now Fish and Wildlife). Oregon has also collected cougar heads for research, and currently hunters must check in the hides, skulls and reproductive organs (including fetuses) of cougars within 10 days of being "taken."