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ODFW uses the "urban cougar myth," he says, and "puts forth the idea that cougars get pushed out of their territory and into town."

"Cougars have always been in close proximity to people," he says, but "cougars don't want anything to do with people."

In 2005, UO student Wes Cross said he spotted a cougar in south Eugene. The sighting was never confirmed, but parents picked their children up from school that day rather than letting them walk home.

Fahy says almost all such supposed cougar sightings are false. Ecologist Hopkins agrees. He says he has photos people have sent him of house cats claiming the kitties were cougars.

"I can't even tell them they were particularly big cats either," Hopkins said.

Both Hopkins and Fahy are troubled by the way ODFW verifies cougar sightings. According to them, the sightings are not really verified at all.

Oregon's cougar management plan is "based upon removing conflict with humans" says Hopkins. "If we look at what we call a conflict in Oregon, the majority of them are unsubstantiated."

Fahy points out that the numbers of cougar sightings and complaints go up when media report about cougars. ODFW, he says, encourages this. "It's so shameful, so outrageous that when they know the difference, they use these numbers to scare people."

Avid hunter Teddy Roosevelt wrote, "No American beast has been the subject of so much loose writing or of such wild fables as the cougar."

In all of North America over the last century, there have been about 100 documented cases of cougar attacks. Of those attacks, 18 people have died of their injuries.

In contrast, 26 people died of fatal dog attacks in the United States in 2006 alone. The National Electronic Injury Surveillance system estimates that 219 people die a year in horse-related accidents. Deer — the cougars' primary prey — also cause large numbers of human-related deaths each year, usually when drivers crash into them on roadways.

According to UO journalism professor Debra Merskin, who is a member of Predator Defense's advisory board, cougars are victims of bad press. She points out that television shows such as Animal Planet's *The Most Extreme — Predators!* give the impression that predators are evil and dangerous and sensationalize violence.

"All the hype? I don't see it on the ground," Fahy says of his own work out in the field with cougars.

Hopkins argues, "I think a rational and reasonable person has to simply conclude (based on empirical evidence and not on arguments instilling fear) that quite clearly cougars represent almost no threat to humans."

When Fahy looks at cougars, he doesn't see the evil the media have attributed to them. He sees an animal "that has so many characteristics we value in ourselves — loyalty and family."

The Hunting Lobby

"Cougars are a success story in Oregon," says the ODFW. They were "nearly extirpated in the 1960s." Extirpation refers to when a species becomes extinct in one specific area, though it may survive elsewhere.

The ODFW sees their job as keeping cougars "at acceptable levels."

The new law allowing the ODFW to depu-



PREDATOR DEFENSE

'I would love to see a complete moratorium on the hunting of cougars.'

— Brooks Fahy,
Predator Defense

tize agents to hunt cougars with hounds simply clarifies "ambiguous text that was in Measure 18," the agency claims.

The ODFW says they have not yet determined who these agents will be or the process for choosing them.

Dungannon of the Oregon Hunters Association says, "Measure 18 stripped wildlife managers from managing cougars in the state."

Many hunters see themselves as pro-wildlife and pro-habitat and a part of wildlife management. Decreasing numbers of sportsmen are spending increasing amounts of money on habitat for hunting big game, according to a recent article in *High Country News*. The OHA has engaged in projects like improving habitat and removing invasive plant species throughout the state.

Despite studies by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that show tourists who come to simply watch wildlife rather than shoot at it spend more on their trips, the hunting lobby has become a powerful presence in state legislatures across the country. In Oregon, the hunters have their own lobbyist, Al Elkins. According to the OHA web page, hunters "have enjoyed a tremendously successful legislative session."

This included the passage of the cougar hunting bill.

Fahy is undaunted by the passage of the bill or by the power of the hunting lobby. The hunters, he says, "make it seem like you are doing wildlife a favor if you kill them."

When it comes to saving cougars and managing wildlife for Oregonians, he says ODFW "needs to represent the true demographic, not just the hunters."

When it comes to the wishes of the voters and the killing of the cougars he loves, Fahy says, "the public has to decide what they will accept or not."

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For more info:
The Predator Defense website: www.predatordefense.org
OHA website: www.oregonhunters.org