

Sportsmen

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W. Joseph O'Conner, Editor

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The Powder River Sportsmen's Club is a member of the Eastern Oregon Sportsmen's Council and an affiliated member of the Oregon Wildlife League and an affiliated member

of the Oregon Wildlife League and an affiliated member of the National Rifle Association.

As Viewed By The Editor

The Dec. 7 club meeting was attended by about 15 members which showed a definite lack of interest by the general membership as to what happens to The Powder River Sportsmen's Club.

Some, including a representative from The Oregon Wildlife Federation and Oregon Hunter's Association, Baker County Chapter, suggested that the club be turned over to either one of these organizations.

After much discussion it was decided that a final re-organization meeting will be held Jan. 11, 1988 at the club's headquarters. A resolution was introduced and seconded that the present board of directors be abolished and be replaced by a president, secretary and treasurer. It was decided that the main function of the club would be oriented to operation of the rifle range and that, when and if necessary the game feeding program would be engaged in until a game feeding crisis develops the club's present game feeding fund would continue to draw interest.

It appears that this December issue of The Powder River Sportsmen will be its last and final issue after over 29 years of continuous publication.

It was not until sometime after it took place that you editor found that around ten antelope were shot, by permission of the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, by a transient land owner or leasor, named Martin, on Sunnyslope, east of Baker. He complained that

these animals, who came down from the adjoining hills for water in the Sunnyslope ditch were destroying his hay crop.

One of these antelope, a male trophy, was apparently killed and had mounted by a character whose major contribution to this community was bankrupting a going business which killed a small livestock market and created more unemployment.

Cougars

The cougar (Felis concolor) is the largest member of the cat family in Oregon, and is known by several other names including panther, puma, and most commonly, mountain lion. It is one of the least common of Oregon's native mammals and is viewed as a symbol of wildness and the western backcountry landscape.

Cougar were characterized as abundant or common throughout most of the forested parts of the state in the 1800's and early 1900's (Bailey, 1936). Settlement of the state, an expanding timber and agricultural industry resulting in loss of cougar habitat and bounty payments all had negative impacts to the population. By the 1930's, cougar numbers had declined and continued to decrease through the late 1960's. Classification as a game animal in 1967 and tightly regulated hunting since 1970 have allowed cougar numbers to increase.

Bounties

Bounties were placed on cougar and other "predators" as early as 1843 and continued to be paid until 1961, when the bounty system was repealed by the Legislature. Between 1900 and 1930, it was not

uncommon to have 200 or more cougar bountied in one year.

Concern for maintenance of the cougar population resulted in its classification as a game animal in 1967. This placed management responsibility with the Oregon State Game Commission (now Fish and Wildlife Commission). For the next two years, 1968 and 1969, there were no open hunting seasons.

Hunting

Controlled cougar hunting began in December 1970 when 25 tags were available for use in the Snake River and Imnaha wildlife units. Controlled hunting has been authorized every year since, with tag requests based upon damage complaints and populations control needs. Tag numbers have been gradually increased to the present level of nearly 460 annual tags valid for a one to two and a half month season. Actual hunter participation has averaged about 55 percent with statewide hunter success averaging slightly better than 40 percent. Historically, the Department has found that one cougar will be harvested for every five tags issued. Demand for cougar tags has been high with applicants having only a 10 to 20 percent chance of drawing a tag.

Hunter success will vary markedly from year to year depending upon snowfall during the hunting period and the access available to the hunters. Dogs are used to take most cougar, and availability of dogs (90% of hunters use dogs) will strongly influence annual harvest.

Damage

Sport hunting is probably the greatest source of cougar mortality. Some animals are taken as a result of damage control activities, but numbers of such animals are low and fairly constant from year to year.

Animal Damage Control take is a result of livestock depredation, with almost all of it concentrated in southwest and northeast Oregon.

Douglas County conducts its own predator control program where several cougar are taken every year in response to complaints from county residents. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife personnel handle numerous cougar complaints annually. Some of these are solved simply by discussing the situation with the complainant and offering control advice. Cougar complaints handled by Department biologists totaled 27 in 1985 and 23 in 1986. Under ORS 498.012, a person may, without benefit of any permit from the Department, take a cougar that is damaging property he owns or lawfully occupies.

As a result of 1985 legislative action, ORS 498.012 was amended to allow landowner designation of an agent to take damaging cougar. Landowners and/or their agents may not pursue cougar off the property where damage is occurring. The amended statute now requires immediate notification of any cougar taken to "a person authorized to enforce the wildlife laws..."

ORS 635-43-080 allows the hunter to retain for person use, the skull and hide of any cougar taken when damaging livestock. The items cannot be sold.

Non-Consumptive Recreation

Knowing cougar are present in parts of Oregon is satisfaction enough for many people. Observing cougar, however, is extremely difficult because of the animal's secretive nature and low activity level during most daylight hours.

Considerable misunderstanding about cougar and their activities exist. Most commonly this is ex-

pressed as concern about being attacked by cougar. There have been no documented cougar attacks on humans in Oregon, despite our enjoying a healthy, growing population of the animal.

Food Habits

Throughout the west, deer are the staple food for cougar, and Oregon is no exception. Northeastern Oregon cougar (Maser and Rohweder, 1983) were using, in order of decreasing frequency, mule deer, Rock Mountain elk, porcupine, snowshoe hare, and deer mice. Natural winter foods of cougar in Oregon's Cascade Range (Towell and Maser, 1985) were principally black-tailed deer and porcupine. Deer, elk and porcupine were the most common winter food items in another Oregon study (Towell and Meslow, 1977).

Habitat

Cougar are widely distributed and use a broad spectrum of habitats ranging from desert to alpine environments. They are, however, very closely associated to deer winter and summer habitats because of their dependence upon deer for food. Solitude and freedom from human interaction generally characterize the more productive habitats.

Human disturbance and major habitat alteration can strongly influence cougar behavior and habitat use as found in northern Arizona where the effects of logging on other human activities on cougar were measured (Van Dyke et al. 1986). Dispersing cougar selected areas for residence characterized by "(1) an absence of timber sale areas; (2) lower than average road densities and (3) few or no permanent human disturbance sites." Resident animals did not appear to be much affected by logging as long as "(1) sale areas are

not overly large in proportion to the lion's home area and (2) adjacent, uncut areas are immediately available..."

Concerns and Strategies

Concerns associated with the present cougar management program are shown to acquaint the reader with problems and needs of the program. Strategies are the means by which the Department will address a management need and/or solve problems.

1. Concern

Cougar population characteristics are not well known.

Strategy

a. The Department will incorporate meaningful results of current research into its management program, and will, within budgetary and personnel constraints, initiate one eastern Oregon cougar study prior to 1992. This study will determine population density and cougar movement patterns within the Catherine Creek wildlife unit.

b. If possible, a similar study will be initiated in a representative western Oregon wildlife unit. Budgetary and personnel constraints will dictate project initiation.

2. Concern

Information gathered from past years' hunter harvest and damage taken cougar has not been adequately analyzed and a need for additional population information exists.

Strategy

a. Mandatory check of all hunter harvested cougar will continue, and prior years' information on population characteristics will be analyzed prior to December 1988.

b. Progress toward development of a cementum annuli aging technique will continue. Aging techniques previously developed and utilized in other states will be

techniques previously developed and utilized in other states will be revised, and if applicable, will be utilized until adoption of a useable cementum annuli technique.

3. Concern

Controlled hunting seasons occur between mid-November and January 31. Harvest statistics, damage complaints and cougar sightings indicate an increasing population in some areas with insufficient harvest, while other areas are being heavily exploited.

Strategy

a. No harvest season will begin prior to November 15.

b. The current three year "wait period" for successful hunt applicants will be eliminated. This will help insure adequate applicants to utilize currently authorized tag numbers.

c. In areas or units where additional harvest is desired, consideration will be given to extending the harvest season beyond January 31, but no later than March 31.

d. Establishment of an allowable harvest (quota) system for some or all hunt areas will be investigated and considered for adoption prior to January, 1989. Such a harvest strategy would be based on removal of equal or fewer animals than the number recruited annually. The system would consider both sport and depredation harvest.

e. Males and females are being harvested at equal rates. Hunting season bag limit will continue to be "one cougar except kittens are protected." Males are more commonly harvested during the latter part of a season (January), therefore, consideration will be given to establishment of a later hunting season

if it is deemed necessary to reduce female harvest and shift harvest to males.

f. No hunting season will be proposed in units or areas where biologists cannot justify a season due to low cougar numbers expressed as lack of sightings, damage complaints and other indication of cougar use.

4. Concern

Amount and timing of snowfall strongly affects annual cougar harvest. The result is erratic annual harvest.

Strategy

a. Substantial fluctuations in cougar harvest are expected, therefore, the Department will manage for three year running average trends. No regulation changes will be made in response to a single years' data collection unless in an emergency situation.

5. Concern

The only effective method for hunting and taking cougar is with the use of trailing hounds. Many hunt applicants are not aware of this and do not have access to trained dogs.

Strategy

a. The Department will continue to allow the use of dogs.

b. The Department will, through use of an educational campaign, try to inform potential cougar hunters of the demands of cougar hunting and the necessity of trailing hounds for a successful hunt. This will hopefully result in only those people applying for hunts that have access to needed hounds.

6. Concern

Current statutes allow private and public landowners to take damage causing cougar without a Department permit.

Strategy

a. The Department will not seek any changes in current statutes.

b. The Department will encourage improved husbandry practices as a means of reducing cougar damage on domestic livestock.

c. The Department will continue to work closely with ADC personnel of APHIS, USDA, and private landowners is solving cougar depredation problems. ADC agents will be requested by the Department to respond to cougar damage complaints when necessary. Their ability to rapidly respond to complaints greatly improves damage control efficiency. One a complaint has been referred to ADC, no private or other agency control personnel will be utilized on that complaint.

d. The Department will explore the use of sport hunters for cougar damage control, especially in the APHIS program.

e. All cougar on damage must be reported to the Department as required by ORS 498.012.

f. The Department will develop a program to effectively handle urban area cougar complaints by July 1988.

7. Concern

Maintenance of cougar habitat is necessary for continuing healthy populations.

Strategy

a. Cougar are generally very dependent upon deer and/or elk for their food, therefore, the better habitats will be those that support healthy deer and/or elk herds. The Department will continue to work with landowners to insure maintenance of satisfactory ungulate and cougar habitats. This will include continued efforts to prevent excess-

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