



**Testimony before the House Committee on
Agriculture and Natural Resources on HB 4119**

Chairs Clem and Esquivel,

My name is Ivan Maluski and I am the Conservation Director for the Oregon Chapter Sierra Club. We are urging your opposition to HB 4119. This bill is a partial rollback of Measure 18, which banned the use of one or more dogs for use in recreational pursuit and hunting of cougars in 1994. The bill requires the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to recommend rules to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission to create a pilot program that allows the use of dogs to hunt or pursue cougars in certain cougar management zones. The program could be expanded throughout the state.

The state's existing cougar management plan already calls for significant reductions in cougar populations based on questionable assumptions about cougar numbers in Oregon and effective management strategies to reduce human/cougar conflicts. Evidence from Washington State has revealed that indiscriminate cougar hunting, rather than targeted removal of specific problem animals, can actually worsen human/cougar conflicts through the destabilization of cougar population and territorial dynamics. Through the creation and expansion of a program that uses recreational hunters with dogs to reduce cougar populations, HB 4119 would not only bring back hunting practices outlawed by voters, it could have unintended consequences. Further, if assessing cougar numbers is a goal of this legislation, we would recommend non-lethal efforts to provide an estimate of Oregon's cougar population, rather than assuming that indiscriminate, recreational hound hunting efforts will provide accurate scientific data that is useful in future cougar management efforts.

Lastly, this bill is unnecessary. Under current law, the ODFW can already use dogs to track down specific cougars that pose a threat to human safety or that have attacked livestock or pets. In 2007, the Oregon Legislature passed HB 2971, which further expanded this authority to clarify that the ODFW can use "agents" to both track down specific problem cougars and reduce overall cougar populations in specific cougar management zones. The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted rules for these agents, which included training, criminal background checks, and a history free of wildlife or hunting violations, as well as an agreement to act under the oversight of trained ODFW personnel. HB 2971 was arguably consistent with overall voter intent on Measure 18 while assuring that ODFW has the tools to address specific problem cougars effectively. Even without provisions for state agents, ODFW can and does utilize dogs to remove specific problem cougars when they pose a threat to humans.

The voters have spoken on this issue. HB 4119 would open the door for recreational use of dogs to track and hunt cougars, which would be a clear rollback of Measure 18. Any proposed rollback of Measure 18 should be referred to voters.