

No on hb2390

Good afternoon Chair Dingfelder and committee members. My name is Sally Mackler and I am representing Predator Defense, a national conservation organization based in Eugene. Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns about HB2390.

We oppose HB2390 today, just as we opposed the same bill in 2007, because it allows sport hunters to become agents of ODFW and use tactics of baiting and hounding to indiscriminately target cougars and bears for easy killing. Voters twice rejected these extreme trophy hunting practices for any reason *except for use in the protection of public safety and property*. Contrary to what you will hear from proponents of this bill, HB2390 does not provide protection to the public.

I think we can all agree that the management duties these agents are assigned to should primarily be for the greater benefit of the public, specifically protection of public safety and property; and that the best and most current science should guide management decisions. If you agree, then you should oppose this bill because rather than provide protection, HB2390 actually puts public safety and livestock at greater risk.

The most current and thorough research on how cougar hunting effects public safety comes from our neighboring state of Washington, where Washington State University has been engaged in over 15 years of ongoing field research on this topic. The results of their work show that heavily hunting cougar populations in prime deer habitat creates increased risk of conflicts by changing the age ratios of the population to favor juveniles, the age class associated with conflict. (Please see attachment #1- summary of WSU studies.)

The reason their findings are so important is because Oregon's Cougar Management Plan's primary focus is on increasing the mortality of cougars through a variety of hunting strategies. Over the last 18 years, since bait and hound sport hunting were prohibited, the cougar mortality in Oregon has more than doubled, going from an average of 200 to 495 last year. The number of cougars killed for sport has increased by over 50% from 160 in 1993 to 242 last year. (Please see attachment #2 - Or. cougar mortality.)

The primary use of the agents HB2390 wishes to retain is to implement the removal of cougars in the 4 target zones established by the cougar plan. These zones are set up in remote areas of the state and are designed to improve hunting opportunities, not to protect public safety or livestock. Within the target zones agents use dogs and snares to indiscriminately track down and kill all cougars found within specific target zones.

It is extremely important to recognize that cougars killed in the established target zones have not been involved in conflicts with people, and that they are being killed indiscriminately for one purpose only: to improve hunting opportunities in prime cougar habitat which is also prime elk and deer habitat where hunters wish to optimize their success by minimizing competition with natural predators. All the target areas are strategically located in remote areas for this purpose, not in areas where conflict with people and livestock occur.

The management strategy being carried out by agents in our state is precisely what over 15 years of research has shown to create increased safety risk. HB2390 specifically increases hunting pressure in deer occupied areas which in turn creates a higher proportions of juvenile animals known cause conflict, including increased use of human occupied areas, attacks on pets and livestock etc.

In addition to issues raised by Hb2390 related to public safety and ethics, there is an additional concern about the cost of utilizing agents to implement the cougar and bear plans. The information available shows an average cost of \$1,494 for each of the approximately 300 cougars killed in target zones since the inception of the plan in 2006. That cost has gradually been reduced to \$711 per cat last year, still a hefty sum to pay for each of the 55 cougars killed in remote areas where they posed no threat. (Please see attachment #3 cougar target zone costs)

Please take the time to review the research findings referenced, and specifically the review of Oregon's Cougar Plan by Washington State University, before you make a decision to continue providing agents to implement a plan that research shows poses an increased risk to the public and livestock, and that uses tactics voters twice disapprove of. (Please see attachment #4 WSU review of or. cougar plan.)

We believe HB2390 is not in the best interests of Oregon citizens or wildlife, and cannot be supported fiscally, scientifically or ethically. Please vote no on HB2390.

Thank you for your attention.

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4 attachments:

1. WSU research summary
2. Oregon cougar mortality stats
3. Or. Cougar Plan review by Wa. State U.
4. Cost for cougar target zones