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Testimony submitted in opposition to House Bill 2624 Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Dear Committee members:

I strongly urge you to vote “No” on HB 2624, which would overturn the twice-expressed will of Oregon voters to ban the use of dogs in hunting cougars. My reasons for opposing the bill itself are expressed below. This is an excerpt from a blog post I wrote on the subject (full post and links can be found here: <http://bit.ly/14lkQYs>).

Another, and perhaps equally important, reason to oppose HB 2624 is the precedent it would set. No longer would statewide initiatives truly apply in the entire state. The legislature will have given a green light to those who fail to defeat an initiative to say, “Hey, you let individual counties opt out of the cougar initiative; now we want the ability to have counties opt out of [whatever].”

Consider Measure 49, a reform of Measure 37, which passed in 2007 with over 60% of Oregonians voting in favor. Yet majorities in many counties were in favor of a weakened land use system. Imagine the legal chaos if a county could opt out of Measure 49. Or any statewide law that a majority of voters in that county deemed unacceptable to them.

Yes, the legislature would have to authorize the ability to opt out of a law. But if you do this in HB 2624, the gate will be opened for other attempts to undo the statewide will of Oregonians -- leading to a balkanization of our state. We already are unduly divided by unnecessary political rancor. Do we really want to add to that?

Here’s what I said in my April blog post when this bill was being considered by a House committee.

Here we go again. Another session of the Oregon legislature; another misguided attempt to undo the voter’s banning (*twice!*) of using dogs to hunt cougars.

And once again, legislation in search of a problem to justify it. [House Bill 2624](#), introduced by Rep. Brian Clem of Salem, would let counties out of the statewide ban if voters in a county approved this.

Yet nobody has ever been killed by a cougar in Oregon. [Cougar complaints are declining](#). [This is an excerpt from an Oregonian news story.]

Opponents called the bills unnecessary because complaints of cougar encounters are down while cougar kills are up, according to state statistics. They said the bills would undo the will of voters, and they questioned the state's ability to count cougars accurately.

Scott Beckstead, Oregon director of the Humane Society of the United States came armed with data from the state that show a steep decline in the number of cougar complaints, from a high of 1,072 in 1999, to 287 in 2012. Over the same period, the data show, the number of cougars killed by hunters has risen from 157 to 242.

Voters didn't bar cougar and bear hunting, Beckstead noted. And they allowed the continued use of dogs to hunt problem or dangerous animals, he said.

"These bills go far beyond that," Beckstead said. "They allow the use of dogs and bait for sport. The voters of Oregon have said they don't want that."

Cougars benefit Oregon's environment. They are part of the balance of nature. They cause very few problems for humans. People are *hugely* more dangerous to people. (See [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).)

As I said in a previous post:

Pop quiz: how many people have been killed by a cougar in Oregon? Is it (a) 126, (b) 18, or (c) none.

From all the hysteria over "managing" the cougar population (which really means needlessly killing them), you'd think the answer would be greater than zero. But it isn't.

No one has ever been killed by a cougar in Oregon. Many people have been killed by hunters. So if we're really concerned about protecting human life, there should be a thinning of the ranks of hunters, not of cougars.

Irrational hysteria is the only reason this bill has been introduced. My wife and I live around cougars. I've walked by fresh cougar deer kills. I frequently take walks at night in woods frequented by cougars. I'm not afraid of cougars.

Hopefully legislators will become similarly educated about these valuable top predators before they vote on HB 2624. Just as wolf management shouldn't be based on "big bad wolf" fairy tales, neither should cougar management.

Sincerely,
Brian Hines

submitted by email