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May 22, 2013

To: The Honorable Jackie Dingfelder, Chair
Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee

Testimony by
Stan Steele, President of the Oregon Outdoor Council
House Bill 2624A

The Oregon Outdoor Council appreciates the opportunity to provide information regarding the biological and societal need for science-based wildlife management and more specifically, science-based cougar management in Oregon.

Today's hearing is a Big Day for Big Game in Oregon.

Prior to 1961, cougars were an unprotected predator in Oregon with no restrictions or limitations on how, when, where or how many could be killed. Cougars, along with a suite of other nuisance wildlife, have been relegated to the same vermin or pest status as the common house fly and many counties had bounties rewarding their unregulated killing. In 1961 the statewide cougar population was estimated to be near 200; the extermination of Mt. Lions in Oregon was nearly complete. To some this might have seemed like an amazing success story; to hunter conservationists it was a tragedy of the commons.

Contrary to what you will hear from the wildlife preservationists before you today, they and/or their organizations were not the societal component most responsible for urging your 1967 legislative colleagues to reclassify the cougar as a "game mammal." Conservationists who treasure the days spent afield with family and friends connecting with nature through time honored hunting traditions, such as hunting wildlife with highly trained scent trailing dogs, a technique developed by our ancestors nearly 15,000 years ago, were the single most vocal and politically active societal component responsible for stopping Oregon's all-out effort to exterminate *Puma concolor*.

All Oregonians should celebrate and acknowledge the ecological success that sportsmen and women, largely led by the efforts of houndsmen and women, achieved when cougars were classified as "Big Game Mammals" in 1967. The reclassification from common predator to "Big Game Mammal" engaged the principles of the world's most successful wildlife conservation plan, known as the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, and is directly responsible for rebuilding Oregon's cougar population from 200 to nearly 6,000 today.

Some ecological alarmists want you to believe that scientifically regulated hunting of cougars with trailing dogs will cause extinction of Oregon's cougars; this is blatantly untrue. The animal rights advocates denounce all science that does not fit into their socially restrictive agenda and you will hear that today.

Today's hearing is not about hound hunting it is about animal rights.

Scientifically regulated hunting is supported by nearly 80% of Americans as a responsible way to manage our nation's wildlife resources. Yet despite widespread public support for science-based wildlife management, a small vocal and well-funded animal rights minority continue to cast the emotional hook by negatively stereotyping the world's most respected and ardent conservationists -- hunters. Distorting factual science and demagogic rhetoric is their only major play.

You are not being asked to change the law on hunting cougars with dogs; you are being asked to give your constituents and all Oregon voters the opportunity to vote on this issue locally.

Today's hearing is simply a courtesy hearing and is being held without the possibility of a committee work session on HB 2624A being scheduled by the committee chair.

Today's political action clearly demonstrates the procedural disrespect shown to Oregon voters, sportsmen and women and, especially, rural Oregonians who support sound conservation of our public trust natural resources through fair and equal political and administrative processes. The fact that one person can kill a widely supported bi-partisan bill such as HB 2624A and rob the entire Senate of the opportunity to vote on an issue that is extremely important to their respective constituents, is not only a gross procedural injustice, but a glaring example of special interest politics. Pacifying actions such as today's courtesy hearing before this important natural resource governance committee will accomplish nothing, but will undoubtedly continue the erosion of the public's trust in government.

Stan Steele, President
Oregon Outdoor Council