

Cougars killed after attacks on livestock

In the Jack Mountain area about 25 sheep have been killed since last fall

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Two cougars killed four ewes in a pasture about 50 yards from the bedroom window of a house a few miles east of Dixonville.

Another cougar killed three sheep about 200 yards from a house on Sable Drive a few miles east of Wilbur.

Those cougars were trapped and disposed of by Mark Dowdy, a county trapper, in the past 10 days.

"These mountain lions have been so close to neighborhoods, I wouldn't be surprised if somebody had seen them (previously)," said Mike Burrell, the supervisory wildlife biologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services office in Roseburg.

With meat prices at record highs and production expenses up, the losses are frustrating to those whose livelihoods involve raising and selling livestock.

Rancher Lance Short said he feels fortunate he didn't lose more sheep from his pasture on the west side of Sable Drive. He said a friend saw a cougar crossing North Bank Road near his property Jan. 28 and reported the sighting to Short. The rancher called his grandson, who has a tag to hunt cougars. The grandson went looking for the cat. He didn't find it, but found a dead lamb.

The cougar returned Saturday night, and two more dead sheep were found Sunday morning.

"I called Mark, and he was kind enough to come out on Sunday," Short said.

Dowdy set cougar leg-hold traps near the dead animals. The traps hadn't been disturbed when he checked them Monday morning, but on his return Tuesday morning, he found the cat trapped. It's typical for cougars to return to their kills.

"It was a male lion looking for an easy meal," Burrell said.

Short said his losses could easily

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have been greater.

"I would have never known I was missing a lamb if my friend hadn't seen the cat and my grandson hadn't gone up on the hill looking for it and found the lamb," Short said. "I'm sure I would have lost more."

In the Jack Mountain area between Dixonville and Glide, Burrell said that about 25 sheep have been killed by cougars since last fall.

Elissa Thau said her four ewes killed close to a house on Strawberry Mountain Road were not eaten.

Neighboring rancher Doug Singleton said seven of his sheep were killed in one night and not a bite was taken on any of the animals.

"To go in there and whack a bunch of them (sheep) is just a sport for them," Thau said of cougars.

Thau added that ewes are not only killed, but surviving ewes don't breed because of the stress put on them by predators.

"Hopefully, we won't get another one (cat) in here for a while," said Singleton after two cougars were trapped and disposed of last week. "We've been after those for over a year."

Singleton said he's frustrated with predatory animals, which include coyotes, killing livestock.

"When you're a business

and a two-legged thief breaks into your business, there's law enforcement that comes out to help with the problem," the rancher said. "But when we have a business and there's a four-legged thief, we don't get the same immediate help because there's not the funding for it."

There are three county-funded trappers in Douglas County, and they must deal with all wildlife-human conflicts, not just with livestock-killing predators. Recent livestock kills involved predatory dogs.

"It's just kind of an unending situation for the county's ranchers," Short said. "I truly feel sorry for the people who are in this business trying to make a living from it. All these cats, coyotes, bears ... they seem to be moving closer to town."

Short said he's the fourth generation living on his property, and he doesn't remember seeing cougars or coyotes on the land when he was growing up.

"I never imagined I'd see one on my place," he said of cougars. "For some reason they're coming down here. It seems if there is a reasonable amount of them, people need to be allowed to eliminate a few of them to control them. They don't seem to have fear of people anymore."

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