



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY**  
OF THE UNITED STATES

**Testimony Opposing HB 2050 and HB 2181**  
**House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources**  
**February 17, 2015**  
**By Scott Beckstead, Senior Oregon State Director,**  
**The Humane Society of the United States**

On behalf of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and our Oregon supporters, I am here to voice our strong opposition to HB 2050 and HB 2181. Additionally, we request that all pending bills that concern the rollback of Measure 18 also be shelved. We request that this committee order that a working group to discuss cougar management in Oregon *that is informed by the best available science*.

These identical bills allow counties to “opt out” of Measure 18, which, in part, banned the use of trailing hounds to hunt cougars **for sport**. These bills undercut the voters, encourage counties to circumvent the state election process, and subject Oregon’s cougar population to unsporting hunting methods. In doing so, HB 2050 and 2181 fully discount the fact that cougars are an important component of Oregon’s natural heritage and remain highly valued by the majority of Oregon voters.

**Measure 18 symbolizes the will of the people.** The people of Oregon have *twice* voted to oppose the use of hounds to hunt cougars because that method is not “fair chase” hunting. Passed in 1994 by a majority, Measure 18 enjoyed even greater public support in 1996 when voters rejected a ballot measure to repeal it.

**Measure 18 works.**

- Measure 18 allows the use of hounds to control individual animals that pose a threat to property or public safety.
- ODFW uses dogs to remove cougars as part of its Cougar Management Plan.

**ODFW’s own 2014 data indicate there is no need for hound-hunting of cougars.**

- Cougar complaints are **at their lowest level** since Measure 18 was passed
- Hunters are killing up to **far more** cougars since Measure 18 was passed
- Nearly **100 times** more cougar tags sold in 2013 than 1993
- ODFW mortality (numbers of cougars killed) data does NOT include **poaching** and **unreported killing**
- Media reports of alleged cougar encounters appear to **coincide** with pending legislative action
- Since 2005, ODFW’s cougar quotas have never been achieved; yet, the cougar quotas were increased by 25 percent for 2015.

## **HB 2050 and HB 2181 thwart good governance in Oregon.**

- If counties are permitted to opt out of Measure 18, they will circumvent two other decisions made by Oregon's voters, and will render meaningless the state's initiative process, a component of good governance that is highly prized by Oregonians.
- These bills would create a patchwork, county-by-county approach to managing cougars, throwing the state's comprehensive management plan for these animals into utter chaos and taking away the ODFW's ability to manage cougars.

**Cougars balance ecosystems, but are vulnerable to persecution.** Because these iconic, shy rare mammals are extremely vulnerable to persecution, Oregon's cougars must be protected and managed for all. Without ecologically functional populations, cougars cannot affect their important top-down role in balancing ecosystems. Cougars also encourage biological diversity.

## **Hound hunting is cruel, unsporting, and disfavored by Oregonians.**

- Hound hunting involves fitting dogs with high-tech radio or GPS collars that allow hunters to monitor the dogs' movement remotely. After the hounds have treed a cougar, trophy hunters arrive to shoot the animal from close proximity.
- During the chase, kittens can be separated from their mothers. When their mothers are killed, dependent kittens can die from starvation, predation or exposure.
- Biologists have also documented that kittens have been killed on the ground by packs of dogs.
- Hunting hounds trespass onto private property and protected lands; they harass and harm non-target species.

**Persecution of cougars increases both complaints and livestock depredations.** A new Washington-based study shows that with high levels of cougar hunting both complaints and livestock losses increase dramatically in the year that follows.

- That is because heavy hunting of cougars causes immigration by young males.
- Study authors found that the sport hunting of cougars to reduce complaints and livestock depredations had the opposite effect.<sup>1</sup>

Cougars are highly valued by Oregonians. The bills before you would allow counties to undercut the voters, encourage counties to circumvent state election processes, and subject Oregon's much valued cougar population to unfair hunting methods. For all of these reasons, The HSUS urges the committee to vote "no" on HB 2050 and 2181.

Again, we ask that all stakeholders enter a new phase and work together using the best available science to avoid these pointless battles over cougars in the Legislature.

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<sup>1</sup> Peebles, K. A., R. B. Wielgus, B. T. Maletzke, and M. E. Swanson. 2013. Effects of Remedial Sport Hunting on Cougar Complaints and Livestock Depredations. *Plos One* **8**.