

Date: April 3, 2019

HB 3118 – Cougar Bill – Support

Chair Witt and Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources:

I am a retired Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) Watershed Manager for the Rogue Watershed District in SW Oregon. I am writing in support of **HB 3118**.

Most Oregon citizens desire State government to be effective and efficient in providing their services. **HB 3118** will enable ODFW to improve their ability to effectively and efficiently manage Oregon cougar populations. Oregon's current cougar population estimate is over 6,400 cougars! This estimate has doubled since 1994 when hounds were banned as a hunting tool for cougars and black bear.

I retired from ODFW in 2001 and experienced the change in cougar populations and management first hand. Prior to 1994 when Oregon citizens called with cougar conflicts, I could just refer them to a licensed hunter who had hounds. The hound hunter would either scare the cougar away from the area or remove it from the population. Managing cougar populations at healthy levels while providing recreational opportunity was relatively simple. After 1994, concerned citizen calls about pets, human safety, and livestock depredations increased significantly. ODFW cougar related workloads increased substantially. Population levels could not be controlled! When citizens call about human safety, pet loss or livestock depredations, all I could do was to refer them to hunters who were mostly ineffective without hounds.

Currently it takes the effort of 14,000 hunters, with cougar tags, to harvest 300. This is barely 4% of the population estimate, and not enough to flatten the ever-rising population curve. **HB 3118** gives ODFW District Biologists a tool with which they can reduce a burgeoning cougar population – particularly in places with high occurrences of livestock loss or human safety threats. Thus, potentially alleviating tragic events such as the cougar caused fatality that happened last fall on Mt. Hood.

The effect of passing **HB 3118** will be to reduce human safety threats, lessen livestock depredations, allow ODFW to better manage cougar populations and improve deer and elk survival rates. Oregon cannot afford to have another cougar caused human fatality like the one last fall on Mount Hood. Let's be responsible wildlife managers, and human safety advocates and enact **HB 3118**!

Thank you,
John Thiebes

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