

February 7, 2025

RE: Testimony on SB 769

Thank you Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash, and members of the Committee:

My Name is Jim Akenson, I live in Enterprise, Oregon and I am a retired Carnivore Research Biologist. I have worked on research projects for ODFW, the University of Idaho, and the Hornocker Wildlife Institute. At this time, I am representing myself to give a professional and historical perspective on why I strongly support SB 769.

I will provide you here with a brief historical perspective:

During the time leading up to the voter-initiated ban on hound hunting for cougars and black bears in Oregon, called Measure 18 in 1994, I was working full-time for ODFW on both cougar and black bear studies based in La Grande.

The Catherine Creek Study (1988 – 1994) focused on cougars and the Starkey Study (1992 – 2000) focused on black bears. Both projects had a primary objective of determining the population structure of these two species. I worked with volunteer houndsmen over a seven-year period, and at the peak of our capture efforts (1994) we had 44 black bears and 29 cougars radio collared. Our studies concluded that reproductive rates and population densities for both species were above average – when compared to other western states – and both study areas allowed hunting with dogs up through 1994. On cougar hunting, there was a quota system in place for the number of cougars that could be removed. We felt that specific hunt unit quotas were well conceived and proven effective for consistently regulating cougar numbers over a long time-period dating back before 1988.

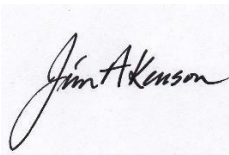
As the voter results were applied to cougar management in 1995, those of us who were deeply involved in managing and understanding this species had real concerns about the future of their management. Our concern was in losing the selective harvest aspect provided by hound hunting, particularly with a broadbrush statewide ban. We felt that hunting would be totally random and not provide wildlife managers with the opportunity to effectively monitor and balance

hunter harvest with other wildlife interests - such as maintaining a huntable population of mule deer and bighorn sheep. We also had concerns about not being able to provide livestock producers with an effective and immediate management tool. This tool was specifically having access to experienced houndsmen and well-trained dogs that could be used for depredation response in the case of cougars that kill livestock and needed to be treed for lethal removal.

Three long decades have passed since 1994, but these concerns are still present. Oregon does not have a balanced approach to cougar management. Hound hunting is a very important tool that can be regulated with much more "harvest precision" than larger scale random general hunting as is the case today. SB 769 is well designed, it is in stride with the current situation, and it provides a much needed "local engagement" for cougar management.

Please support this bill as it provides both ODFW and rural communities with a needed tool to restore sensible management of cougars.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Akenson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

Jim Akenson  
Enterprise, Oregon