

Testimony of Scott Beckstead, Chief Petitioner for Measure 18, in Opposition to SB 769

TO: Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfires

FROM: Scott Beckstead, Chief Petitioner for Measure 18

DATE: February 11, 2025

Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash, and Members of the Committee:

I am submitting this testimony in my capacity as a chief petitioner for Measure 18, the voter-approved law that banned the use of packs of radio-collared dogs to hunt bears and cougars, as well as the use of bait to hunt bears. Thank you for the opportunity to voice my strong opposition to SB 769, which seeks to overturn the will of Oregon voters by allowing counties to “opt out” of Measure 18 and reinstate a practice that Oregonians have twice overwhelmingly rejected as cruel and unsporting.

SB 769 would create a chaotic and unenforceable patchwork of wildlife management policies across the state. More importantly, it sets a dangerous precedent, allowing counties to selectively disregard voter-approved statewide ballot measures. If this bill succeeds, what’s to stop counties from opting out of other laws enacted by the people? This undermines Oregon’s cherished initiative process and the democratic principle that a statewide vote represents the will of the people.

Beyond these legal and governance concerns, hounding is an exceptionally cruel and ethically indefensible practice. It involves using packs of radio-collared dogs to relentlessly chase a cougar—sometimes for miles—until the exhausted animal seeks refuge in a tree or on a rock ledge, at which point the trophy hunter arrives and shoots the cornered animal at close range. This is not “fair chase” hunting, and even many ethical hunters oppose it.

Hounding also inflicts harm on all animals involved. The pursuing dogs risk injury or death if the cougar decides to fight back. Mother cougars may be forced to abandon their dependent kittens, who will likely perish. Hounds may kill non-target wildlife or trespass onto private lands, leading to conflicts with landowners. These are not hypothetical concerns; they are well-documented realities of hound hunting.

It is also crucial to remember that Oregonians have spoken clearly and decisively on this issue—twice. Measure 18 was passed in 1994 by a strong majority, and in 1996, an even larger majority rejected an attempt to repeal it. Despite this, lawmakers continue to attempt to override the public’s decision in favor of powerful special interests.

Newspapers across the state have repeatedly condemned these legislative attempts to undermine Measure 18. Here are just a few examples:

The Oregonian, March 11, 2001

"Legislators are again trying to subvert the twice-approved prohibition against hunting cougars with hounds....In every legislative session since Oregon voters first banned hunting cougars and

bears with hounds, passing Measure 18 in 1994, some lawmakers have tried to repeal or relax the measure...There is no documented case—not one—of a cougar harming a human in Oregon. It should take more than an increase in cougar sightings to persuade the Legislature to defy a large majority of Oregonians who twice voted against cougar hunting with hounds.”

Medford Mail Tribune, March 18, 2001

"Although opponents of the limits would like Oregonians to imagine a crouching cougar behind every tree, evidence of harmful effects from cougars is just too scant to merit immediately overturning the law.”

Ashland Daily Tidings, March 5, 2002

"There is no evidence that the stately cougar population is out of balance...Lawmakers have tried to overturn Measure 18, and ODFW has joined in by employing scare tactics as to the public danger from cougars. Problem is...we haven't suffered any of the predicted hideous cat attacks.”

Grants Pass Daily Courier, February 20, 2002

"Oregonians passed Measure 18—and later rejected an attempt to repeal it—because they want to give the magnificent cats a sporting chance against hunters. It isn't very sporting for a hunter to blast a cougar after his hounds have chased it up a tree.”

Medford Mail Tribune, March 12, 2002

"Angered by the passage of a 1994 initiative banning the use of dogs in hunting cougars, the Legislature has made several runs at reversing the ban or increasing cougar kills through other means...Lawmakers have introduced more than 20 bills to revamp Measure 18, many of which would have quietly opened the door again to hound hunting.”

The Oregonian, March 6, 2002

"What is it about Oregon and cougars? The cultural war over these big cats grew wearisome a long time ago, but we're off on another ugly skirmish reopening old wounds between rural and urban Oregonians. This time, state and federal biologists picked the fight with a controversial plan to kill up to 32 cougars in Oregon. Not to protect human lives. Not to save endangered animals. Not to wipe out a disease. Just to see what effect the killing might have on elk populations...But the plan that biologists came up with seems like a bad case of itchy trigger finger. Killing all those cougars may turn out to be lawful, but it's going to be a disaster in the public-sensibilities department.”

For all these reasons, I urge the Committee to reject SB 769 and respect the will of Oregon voters. This bill is not about science-based wildlife management; it is a politically driven attempt to dismantle a voter-approved policy that has withstood the test of time. Passing this bill would not only be an affront to Oregon's democratic process but also a declaration of war on one of the state's most iconic and ecologically important species.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please oppose SB 769.

Scott Beckstead

Chief Petitioner, Measure 18