

February 10, 2024

RE: VOTE NO ON SB 769

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

I am submitting this testimony as a longtime Oregonian and in my capacity Director of Research and Regulatory Policy for the Center for a Humane Economy and Animal Wellness Action.

Oregonians are opposed to trophy hunting of cougars, including with the use of hounds, and want to keep them protected. Oregonians have already shown where they stand on this issue – twice. In 1994, Oregon voters passed Measure 18. For 30 years, it has protected cougars and bears from the cruel, abusive and unsporting practices of baiting and hounding. In 1996, Oregonians decisively protected Measure 18 by an even larger margin.

Current law already allows the use of hounds to address issues with individual cougars who threaten property or public safety, or to carry out state wildlife management objectives. This exemption has been successful in removing individual cougars involved in conflicts with humans, pets, and livestock while retaining the protections the voters want from abusive hunting methods.

Allowing the indiscriminate killing of Oregon’s cougar population, including with cruel and unsporting hounding methods, is not sound wildlife management and not in the best interest of Oregonians or our state’s cougar population.

Culling a native carnivore population, especially one as sensitive as cougars, is not an effective management approach and will likely disrupt their communities resulting in more, not less, conflicts with humans, pets and livestock.

According to the nation’s top carnivore biologists, ODFW grossly overstates Oregon’s cougars by including kittens – most of which don’t survive to adulthood – in their estimates. By so doing, and by using other flawed population-estimation techniques, ODFW creates the erroneous impression that Oregon has by far the highest cougar population in the nation.

Studies show that trophy hunting of cougars exacerbate conflicts with humans, pets and livestock because when adult cats are removed – particularly resident adult males – younger, less experienced cats move into those vacancies, and they are the individuals most likely to engage in livestock predation.

SB 769 would create a chaotic and unenforceable patchwork of wildlife management policies across the state and would set a dangerous precedent. Allowing counties to selectively disregard voter-approved statewide ballot measures is unacceptable. It would undermine Oregon’s initiative

process and the democratic principle that a statewide vote represents the will of the people.

Hounding is a cruel and an 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.

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.

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 consideration and for your service to the people of our great state. We urge this Committee to oppose SB 769.

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