

Submitter: Christina Witham
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and
Wildfire
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB769

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB769. This has to be a decision by our county and this bill will allow that decision to be made by our constituents.

I am in support of this bill due to several factors, number one being public safety. ODFW has a target population of 3000 for mountain lions in Oregon, the current number is approximately 7000.

Baker County sits within an area of highest cougar density; "Native to Oregon, cougars range throughout the state, the highest densities occur in the Blue Mountains in the northeastern part of the state and in the southwestern Cascade Mountains. Their primary food source is deer, but they will also consume elk, raccoons, bighorn sheep, and other mammals and birds." (ODFW Apr 12, 2023)
"They are highly territorial— a male cougar may dominate a home range of 50 to 150 square miles (for comparison, the City of Seattle is 92 square miles). (Cougar Facts - Nature Mapping Foundation)

52% of Baker County is public land, all communities within the county are adjacent or in close proximity to public land where mountain lions thrive. The pressure from mountain lions on deer results in extensive numbers of deer within city limits which results in conflicts with people and pets. The numbers of cougar sightings within city limits have increased in step with the increasing number of cougars on the landscape. February 6th, 2025, the Baker City Police Department killed a cougar within the Baker City limits which is one among numerous sightings and kills since the option of hunting with dogs was removed.

We must be able to allow for hunting with dogs to reduce the numbers within our region as it is considered the most effective method for harvesting cougars. For public safety, we must reduce the numbers to the ODFW desired population of 3000, more than half the number that we currently have. While a cougar attack on humans is rare, small children and pets are considered particularly vulnerable to cougar predation due to their size and perceived similarity to natural prey, meaning they could be mistaken for a smaller animal by a cougar, especially if unsupervised in cougar habitat, particularly during dusk or dawn when cougars are most active; therefore, close supervision is crucial in areas where cougars are present. This is a direct risk to our children and pets in our yards, in our urban areas and should be our decision going forward.

Thank you for your time and consideration in allowing this decision by the counties most affected.