

2-12-2025

Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash and Committee,

Thank you for providing constituents the opportunity to be heard on SB 769, a bill that impacts every county in Oregon to some extent.

As a lifelong Oregon resident of 45 years, I have personally witnessed the alarming decline in the mule deer population. Where we once had abundant ungulate populations, we now see a tragic decrease due to the mismanagement of Oregon's wildlife—not by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, but by those who supported Measure 18 in 1994. Our current approach fails to effectively manage deer, elk, antelope, bighorn sheep, and other species, all while introducing yet another apex predator—the gray wolf. The increasing competition for these wildlife resources among bears, cougars, and wolves is an irresponsible failure of stewardship, disproportionately impacting rural Oregonians who deal with these challenges firsthand.

It is also important to distinguish between cougar population and cougar density. If the provided numbers are correct, the last official count was that the state of Oregon has approximately 7,000 cougars. Given that cougars require a home range of 50–150 square miles, the minimum habitat needed to sustain this population would be 350,000 square miles. However, Oregon's total land area is only 98,381 square miles, meaning the state supports an estimated cougar density of 3.5 to 10.6 cougars per 50 square miles—including both urban and rural areas, as well as bodies of water.

Although rare, cougar sightings are becoming more frequent in Oregon's forests and foothills. Hunting these elusive predators is extremely difficult, as they are not prey animals. SB 769 would allow each county to decide, through a local vote, whether to permit the use of hounds for cougar management—under the careful oversight of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. This approach recognizes that wildlife management is not one-size-fits-all and should be determined at the county level rather than through a statewide mandate.

Respectfully,

Jake Seavert

Union County Commissioner