Cougar Safety Team
Status Update
February 19, 2021

Eric Gardner
Director, Wildlife Program
May 2020

Goal: People feel safe in Cougar Country

Objective: Manage cougars while being trusted to take action to help people feel safe

OUTREACH
- WDFW provides tools to safely live in cougar country
- Refine overarching public safety communication strategy
- Refine digital communication: videos, live events, blogs
- Build on existing models to work with community
  • Reduce deer feeding
  • Improve husbandry
  • Living with cougars safety messages

RESPONSIVE TO PUBLIC
- Refine internal protocols to be more responsive
  • Review Dangerous Wildlife Response Policy
  • Imp. improved dangerous wildlife response matrix
- Improve internal reporting between Wildlife Program and Enforcement to: track incidents, focus response efforts, and inform the public
- Continue development of Cougar Pursuit/Hound Training WAC

SCIENCE INFORMS DECISIONS
- Complete research on cougars: Provide relevant research
  • WDFW (Pred/Prey; West side)
  • Non-WDFW (Kalispel Tribe’s cougar study)
- Create science communication forum to share findings
- Implement Option 4, review outcomes in hunting seasons 2020
  • Initiate review of GMP in May 2021 ensure adequate flexibility related to recreational hunting (18 month process)

PARTNERSHIPS
- Continue to build partnerships with sheriffs, Enforcement and Conflict staff
- Reinvigorate partnerships with local elected commissions and NGOs: focus on shared goals
- Begin revision process for WAC 220-440-030 Public Safety Cougar Removal, using an external working group
  • Review recs from previous effort: Hound training opportunity and Wildlife feeding regulation
Team Sponsor:
Amy Windrope - DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Team Lead:
Eric Gardner - WILDLIFE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Director’s Office Members:
Steve Pozzanghera – REGION 1 DIRECTOR
Kessina Lee – REGION 5 DIRECTOR
Samantha Montgomery - COMMUNICATIONS CNSLT 5

• 15 Virtual Meetings: June 17, 2020 thru February 17

Wildlife Program Members:
Mick Cope - DEPUTY PROGRAM DIR
Jerry Nelson - CHIEF SCIENTIST
Anis Aoude - GAME DIVISION MANAGER
Dan Brinson - NATURAL RESOURCE SCIENTIST 4 – CONFLICT SECTION MANAGER
Scott McCorquodale – REGION 3 WILDLIFE PROGRAM MANAGER
Richard Beausoleil - F&W BIOLOGIST 4 – BEAR/COUGAR SPECIALIST
Stephanie Simek – NATURAL RESOURCE SCIENTIST 4 – CARNIVORE SECTION MANAGER

Enforcement Members:
Steve Bear - CHIEF
Paul Golden - DEPUTY CHIEF
Alan Myers – CAPTAIN
Rebecca Bennett - COMM OUTREACH & ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION SPECIALIST 4
Outreach

• Cougar strategic communications plan update
  • Videos
  • Predator/Prey Project video
  • News interviews
  • Proactive media outreach
  • Pamphlet revamped
  • Social media content creation
  • Living with cougars toolkit
  • Community-focused communications
The plan’s goals include:
• increasing the public’s awareness of human safety
• protection of property so that the cougar complaint rate is steady or declining
• increase understanding of cougar ecology, behavior, safety awareness, and coexistence in cougar country safety outreach at the community level
It may be interesting to guess the age of the cougar you harvest based on the size and sex. It might be a kitten, sub-adult — less than two-years-old — or an adult. But, you (and we) can’t be sure about an animal’s age without closer inspection and tooth data.

Check out this blog about the differences between field aging and tooth data, and how we use the data to understand cougar age structure:

https://wdfw.wa.gov/using-cougar-tooth-data-to...
Outreach

City of Bellevue partnership example
Languages translated: Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Russian

Sharing the Woods with Cougars

Bobcats are frequently misidentified as cougars. Learn how to identify both species.

- Don't feed wildlife or feral cats. Remember that predators follow prey, so never feed deer or elk or let them be comfortable in your yard.
- Keep dogs and cats indoors from dusk to dawn.
- While hiking, be noisy and lead your dog. Be aware of your surroundings.
- If you happen upon a deer carcass, leave the way you came in. A cougar may return to feed on it.
- If you see a cougar, face it. Talk to it firmly while slowly backing away. Try to appear larger than the cougar. Always leave the animal an escape route.
- Never run - just keep calm. Remember that cougars attack humans on extremely rare.

For wildlife management questions or concerns, please contact the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife. Their "Living with Wildlife" fact sheets have additional helpful information.
Media outreach methods and tools include:

- Internal staff communications
- Cougar safety community kits
- Videos
- Live webinar with chat feature
- Targeted social media ads
- Blog posts
- News releases
- Interviews to media
- One-on-one meetings with specific groups
Responsive to the Public

Evaluation of Agency Dangerous Wildlife Policy and Procedure

- Describes agency response to public reports of interactions, primarily with cougar and bear
- Existing policy is dated – plan is to update and clarify roles and responsibilities
- Cross-Program Working Group – Assembled and tackling Dangerous Wildlife policy and procedures updates.

Database improvements – Enforcement and Wildlife Program

- CODY RMS - Problem Wildlife Confirmation Codes Broadened for Improved Reporting
- Added Access to Cody RMS for all Wildlife Conflict Specialists
- Improved Officer Reporting Criteria for All Cougar Related Calls
- Building Improved Reporting Procedures into New Spillman RMS
- Practical application – identify areas needing focused attention
Practical Applications
Responsive to the Public

Non-Lethal Pursuit Pass Training Program

- Cougar Safety Team coordinated the finalization of the WAC language—provided input and recommendations

- Working Dogs CR-102 WAC approved by Commission January 29, 2021

Next Steps

- Cross-Program engagement through the Cougar Safety Team and focused meetings
- Once codified internal procedural requirements will take place generating the program procedures and guidelines.
2020 Regional After Action Reviews (AAR's) for the Purpose of:
✓ Acknowledging the Good Work of Regional Staff and Understanding Why Regional Responses can Vary
✓ Identifying Areas Where Consistency can Help Us Improve
✓ Identifying Areas Where Change/Additional Actions May be Needed

The AAR's:
• Assigned to RD's on 12/29/20
• Five of Six Regional AAR's Have Been Completed – RD Consolidation of Input Currently Underway
• Summaries/Recommendations to be Complete by 4/15/21 (Includes Discussion and Input at two CST Meetings and an EMT Meeting)
### 2019/2020 Enforcement Cougar Call Data

#### Cougar Calls

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
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<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
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<td>93</td>
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<tr>
<td>R6</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>161</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1092</strong></td>
<td><strong>905</strong></td>
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#### Cougar Calls Responded To

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Region</th>
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<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>R6</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>95</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>680</strong></td>
<td><strong>533</strong></td>
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Cougars Removals In Response to Public Safety

**Cougar Removals - Statewide**

- 2015: 26
- 2016: 27
- 2017: 32
- 2018: 80
- 2019: 133
- 2020: 99

**Cougar Removals by Region**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021 *Feb 15th</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>69</td>
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<tr>
<td>R2</td>
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<td>R5</td>
<td>17</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>133</strong></td>
<td><strong>99</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
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Science Informing Decisions

Science Review Panel
• To review research papers that address cougar conflict
• Inform policy makers and management decisions regarding which research is most applicable

Deliverable
• Report that ranks the scientific rigor and the utility of the literature reviewed

Timeline
• Fall 2021
Science Informing Decisions
Underway and Future Work

• Assemble the peer-reviewed literature and agency professional reports from the last 15 years that speak to cougar conflict
• Assess literature as to what questions the authors attempted to address and how well they accomplished the task
• Assess the literature in terms of scientific rigor
• Identify which works speculate (without data) on topics the authors really didn’t try to address
• Identify research questions of interest that haven’t been adequately addressed to-date
Science Informing Decisions
COUGAR CONFLICT SCIENCE REVIEW TEAM

WDFW
Anis Aoude
– Game Division Manager
Scott McCorquodale
– Regional Program Manager
Stephanie Simek
– Carnivore Section Manager
Brian Kertson
– Carnivore Research Scientist
Rich Beausoleil
– Bear and Cougar Specialist
Jerry Nelson
– Science Division Manager

External collaborators
Chuck Anderson
Mammal Research Section Leader
Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Mark Hurley
Wildlife Research Manager
Idaho Fish and Game
Glen Sargent
Research Wildlife Biologist
USGS Northern Prairie Research Center
Bruce Johnson
Wildlife Research Scientist
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
(ret.)
Partnerships

External Working Group Committee

• Evaluate need and scope
• Identify roles and workload
• Develop Charter
Objective: Manage cougars while being trusted to take action to help people feel safe

OUTREACH
WDFW provides tools to safely live in cougar country and reflect regional differences
Refine overarching public safety communication strategy
Refine digital communication: videos, live events, blogs
Build on existing models to work with communities to:
• Reduce deer feeding
• Improve husbandry
• Deliver living with cougars safety messages

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• inform the public
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• Non-WDFW (Kalispel Tribe’s cougar study)
• Explore methods for improved pop estimates
Create science communication forum to share findings
Implement Option 4, review outcomes in hunting seasons 2020
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Continue to build partnerships with sheriffs, Enforcement, and Conflict staff
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Form external working group
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• Review recs from previous effort: Hound training opportunity and Wildlife feeding regulation
# Next Steps - Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHEN</th>
<th>NEXT STEP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February - April</td>
<td>After Action Review Summary and Recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February – March</td>
<td>Create cougar sighting media fact sheet</td>
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<tr>
<td>February – May</td>
<td>Create community toolkit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February – May</td>
<td>Provide tools for living with cougars</td>
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<tr>
<td>February - June</td>
<td>Cross-Program Working Dog Procedure Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February - August</td>
<td>Dangerous Wildlife Policy Review and Draft Revision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February - September</td>
<td>Science Team Review Panel</td>
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Questions?