

Coexisting with cougars in Washington:

A guide for small livestock owners



Washington
Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**

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Understanding Potential Wildlife Encounters

As the human population continues to increase in Washington and more people are raising their own livestock (e.g. goats, sheep, poultry, alpacas, llamas, miniature horses/donkeys), potential interactions between cougars and people may increase. Human population growth has led to habitat loss and fragmentation, leading to less connectivity for wildlife to move safely between habitats. Although cougars are rarely seen because they often travel at night, some do travel through human populated areas. These factors can result in increased vulnerability of unprotected small livestock and pets on the landscape, and the possibility that these domestic animals may be taken as a natural food source by cougars and other carnivores.

Seeing a cougar does not mean that the cougar is an immediate threat to your livestock or pets. However, using preventative measures will reduce

the likelihood of negative encounters, including the injury or killing of livestock by a cougar, commonly describes as “depredation”. The risk of depredation by a cougar is low, though any loss can be difficult for a property owner.

- It is possible to keep domestic animals safe using effective animal husbandry practices and proven methods to deter and exclude cougars.
- The only long-term solution to minimize injury or loss is to prevent access to vulnerable pets and livestock.

Wildlife known to have harmed pets or livestock are not generally candidates for relocation. Relocation does not prevent conflict and can be harmful to the cougar. Removing or securing attractants is more effective than relocating carnivores.



Cougar Behavior

More than half of Washington is cougar habitat, though many people are unaware of their natural behaviors and range. Cougars occur throughout the state except in some portions of the Columbia Basin. Cougars are solitary and, while they generally avoid people, they may live adjacent to, travel, hunt, and cache their food in areas close by people.

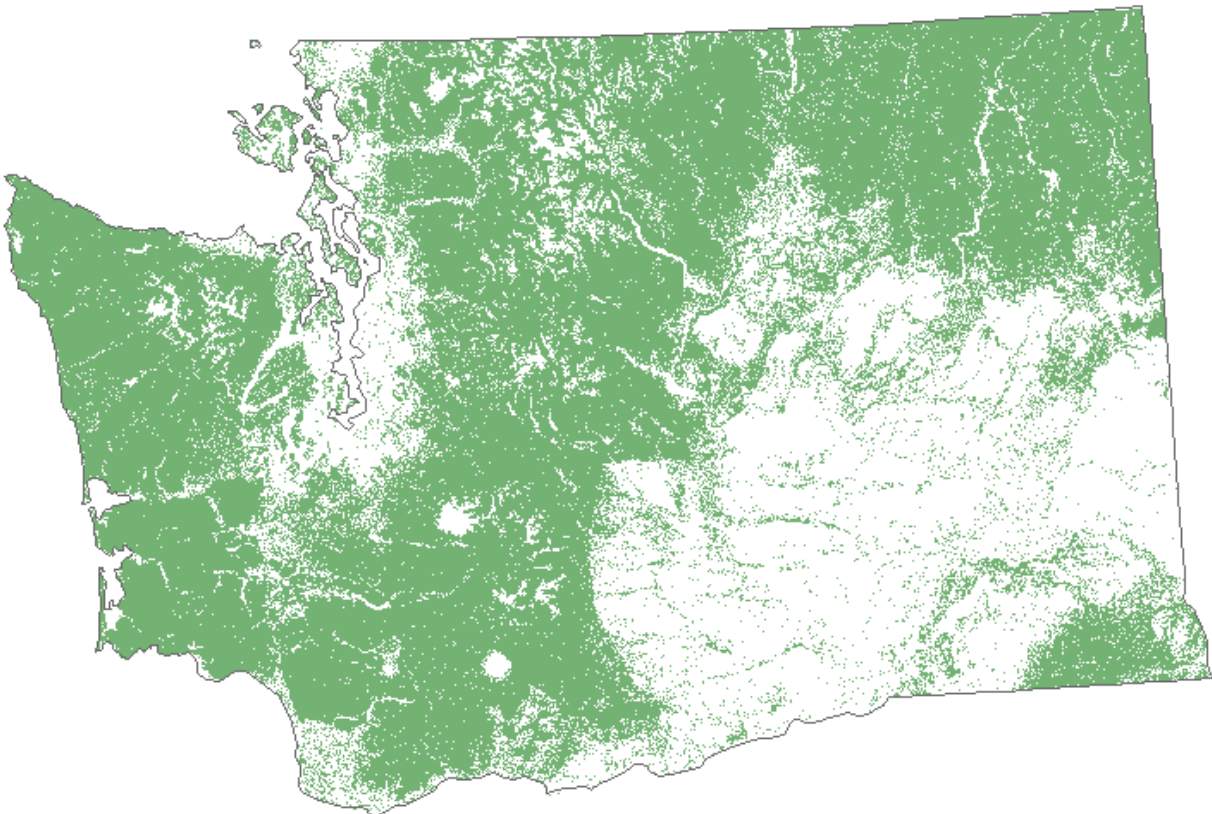
A cougar can maintain a home range of up to 200 square miles. The frequency and extent of movement within their range may vary seasonally. Males establish territories that they will defend from other male cougars, even to the point of death for one of the males. Competition with other cougars is common and an effective way by which cougars limit their own populations.

Female cougars can give birth year-round to one to

four kittens, but in Washington most tend to give birth July-September and average two kittens. Young cougars may stay with their mother for up to two years, learning how to hunt and survive on their own. Cougars traveling together are typically a family group.

Cougars are obligate carnivores, meaning their diets consist of other animals, mostly ungulates like deer and elk, but which also include numerous small and medium sized wild mammals and birds. For more information on cougars in Washington, please visit: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/species/puma-concolor#conflict>.

You can also download the Discover Washington's Cougars pamphlet: https://wdfw.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-10/cougar_brochure.pdf.



Cougar habitat in Washington state

Cougar Conservation

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife—and its partners—work to further human-wildlife coexistence through the following steps:

- minimize negative human-wildlife interactions,
- maintain genetically diverse and healthy populations,
- identify and conserve important habitats and habitat connections,
- improve public awareness, and
- identify and research emerging management and scientific issues.

For more information on cougars in Washington, visit: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/species/puma-concolor>

Laws and Regulations

Knowing what safe, effective and legal methods are available to address potential cougar interactions can be overwhelming. The Revised Code of Washington (RCW) and the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) establish the basis of fish and wildlife protections and management in the state. There are several laws and regulations specific to cougars in Washington.

Washington Laws Prohibit Feeding Wildlife

Two Washington laws make it illegal to intentionally feed wildlife or otherwise leave food waste in places where it will attract large wild carnivores. The laws were designed to keep both people and wildlife safe. Violations are subject to monetary fines. (RCW 77.15.790; RCW 77.15.792)



Cougar Depredation

Property owners have legitimate concerns regarding cougar depredation. If a depredation occurs, report the incident immediately to WDFW; time is critical in these events. Please do not allow people or pets in the area, so that evidence is preserved, and WDFW staff can confirm what happened. WDFW staff may recommend measures to help prevent further losses.

WDFW has established rules that govern human-wildlife conflict. In cases when livestock or pets are injured or killed by cougars, a property owner may kill the cougar in the act of attacking or damaging property, but the property owner must notify WDFW immediately.

Property owners may request a depredation permit to allow lethal take of the offending animal that have injured or killed livestock caused by cougar predation. The animal must be turned over to WDFW and remains the property of the state. WDFW also has the ability to remove animals and/or capture the animal involved. WDFW seeks to avoid, where possible, cougar mortality resulting from depredation and related conflict and advises non-lethal deterrence instead.

WDFW can assist property owners and address and recommend ways to prevent future carnivore depredations. WDFW's primary focus is to prioritize and support actions and approaches that are preventative. The following are some of the reasonable preventative measures that should be used:

- Removing animal carcasses and carcass parts from the immediate area—these are attractants. If a depredation has occurred, do not remove animal carcasses until after WDFW investigates.
- Removing brush and/or lower limbs of vegetation which provide cover for carnivores.
- Not feeding or providing mineral licks for wild ungulates such as deer and elk.
- Not allowing deer and elk to rest near structures or dwellings.
- Sealing off open spaces under porches and sheds.
- Installing or repairing fences or secure shelters to protect pets and small livestock (e.g. goats, sheep, poultry alpacas, llama, miniature horse/donkey): secure enclosures must have a roof and a strong door that can be locked from dusk to dawn when cougars are most active.
- Night penning of hobby livestock and pets using techniques listed above.
- Use of motion-activated lighting around livestock enclosures, homes, and areas that provide cover for cougar and other carnivores.

If vulnerable animals are left unsecured, and carcasses are not removed, a cougar may identify them as a food source and will return to feed over several days. Securing livestock after an incident is crucial to preventing future depredations.

Exclusion Methods

Before You Start

Consider what animals you have and what type of exclusion method may be most appropriate. Some common examples:

- **Small Animals.** Chickens and other poultry birds, dogs, cats.
- **Medium Animals.** Goats, sheep, llamas, alpacas, miniature horses.
- **Large Animals.** Horses, donkeys, cattle.
- **Evaluate the materials and resources.** This will help you decide if you should build a new enclosure or can secure an existing enclosure. Each property and situation may be unique.



Secure Enclosures

Fully enclosed carnivore-resistant enclosures to shelter animals from dusk to dawn are the most effective way to protect domestic animals when sharing the landscape with carnivores.

Provide secure enclosures for birthing, young, ill, or other vulnerable animals to reduce the risk of predation. Prevention is key!

Enclosure Types

- **Barns.** From small kits to custom-built, these 4-sided structures can vary greatly in price.
- **Horse Stalls.** New or existing stalls can be covered and enclosed with secure fencing or panels.
- **Covered Runs.** Can be as simple as wire fencing or chain link or as complex as a walled structure with a solid roof.
- **Pens, Kennels and Dog Runs.** Pre-made pens or runs can be used singly or connected together to create a larger safe enclosure.
- **Cages and Coops.** Can be an effective option for small animals.

Enclosure Components

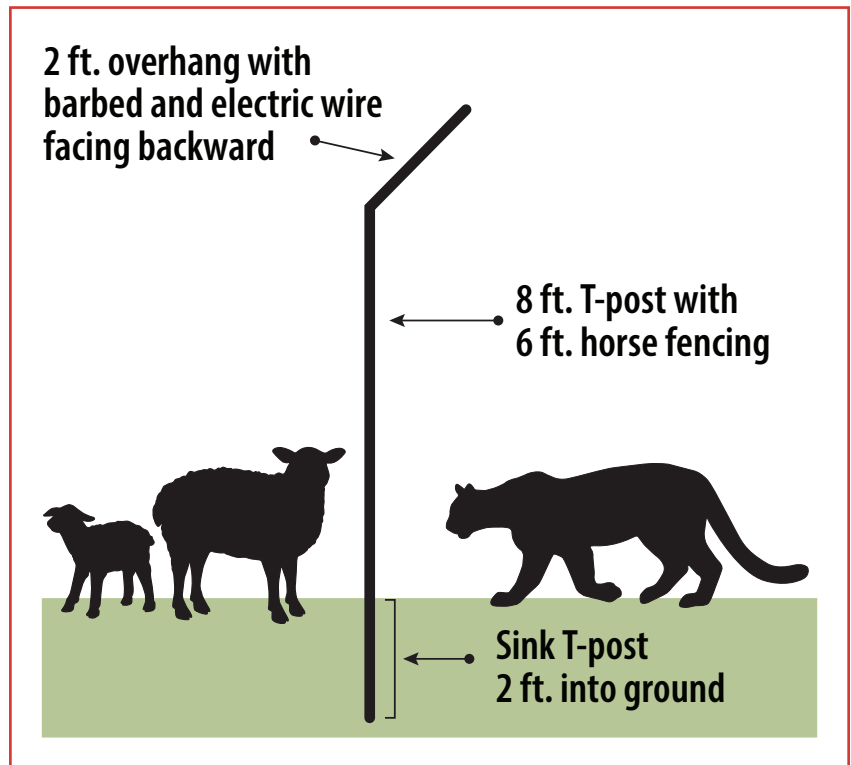
- **Walls.** Ensure proper ventilation for pets and livestock.
 - Replace or repair damaged pieces.
 - Close any openings larger than 6 inches.
 - Reinforce or replace walls with 11-gauge chain link or equivalent. (Poultry wire can be easily broken.)
 - Extend walls 12 inches below ground or install an apron fence (specific design that may exclude other carnivores from digging under fences).
- **Windows.** Secure windows with shatter-proof glass, latched shutter, wire mesh or welded wire fencing.
- **Door.** Must be sturdy and able to close and latch securely. Close any gaps around the doorframe.
- **Roof.** Must be strong enough to support the weight of a cougar or other carnivore. Plan for the roof to sustain a 200 lb weight capacity. Close any openings to prevent carnivore intrusion.

Temporary Fencing

Temporary fencing can be a cost-effective alternative to permanent fencing, especially if it is electrified. It can often be constructed quickly and designed to secure animals for short periods of time (e.g. livestock rotation). Because it is thinner than permanent fencing, it works best when electrified.

Remember!

- Do not build fences near trees. Cougars can jump up to 15 feet horizontally.
- Cougars can manipulate thinner wire with their claws.
- Confirm if construction permits are required.
- Comply with all regulations and restrictions.
- Consider fire clearances.
- Be considerate of neighbors.



Deterrence Methods

Wild animals often avoid things they do not understand. Deterrent methods may discourage carnivores such as cougars, bears, wolves, bobcats, fox, and coyotes. They may also discourage prey species whose presence may attract carnivores onto a property.

Deterrent methods include items such as guardian dogs, lighting, noisemakers, carcass removals (see list below). Deterrent methods alone may not fully protect pets and livestock. Each deterrent method has a degree of effectiveness.

Deterrent methods, with the exception of guardian dogs, typically provide a short-term fix as compared to secure enclosures and proper fencing (exclusion methods).

Deterrent Method

- Carcass removal (attractant)
- Enclosed shelter for animals at night (small operations)
- Livestock guardian dog or guardian animal (e.g. donkey, llama)
- Sheltered facility for birthing (sheep, cow, goat)
- Permanent electric fencing
- Electro-net fencing
- Fladry or turbo fladry fencing
- Woven-wire fencing with trip wire
- Fright tactics or devices (hazing)
- Human presence
- Temporary electric fencing



How Deterrents Work

- Alerts people to the presence of wildlife on their property.
- Guard animals warn domestic animals to be vigilant and alert to the presence of other animals.
- Disrupt hunting behavior, such as reducing the element of surprise while “stalking” potential prey.
- Diminish hunting advantage, such as when sudden lights reduce night vision.
- Mimic the presence of humans, which cougars tend to avoid.
- Mimic the presence of other animals that may represent risk or danger.

Types of Deterrent Devices

- **Sound deterrents** are most effective when triggered by a motion sensor in response to nearby movements. Cougars may be deterred by human voices, such as talk radio, and sirens or air horns.
- **Visual deterrents** typically involve light, movement, or threatening images. Motion- activated lights may be effective. Lights that stay on all night provide little protection.
- **Physical deterrents** such as electric wires produce unpleasant stimuli meant to cause discomfort or fear, but not physical harm.



Livestock Guardian Animals

Specially trained livestock guardian dogs (large breed) can be highly effective to deter cougars and other carnivores. Other livestock guardian animals, such as llamas, are less effective and may be mistaken for prey. Secure enclosures, and other deterrent methods, are often a more effective and affordable option.

Unlike other methods, guardian dogs can be effective long-term deterrents. Cougars can become habituated to other deterrents, which reduces their effectiveness. Exclusion methods like fencing or pens provide permanent protection.

Attractant Removal

Identifying and removing attractants to cougars and other wildlife is important to reduce the risk of potential conflict. Cougars, like many animals, can be opportunistic scavengers. They may be attracted to sick, injured or dead animals, blood, and bodily fluids.

If a cougar kills a domestic animal or an animal dies on your property, remove the carcass from the immediate area after contacting WDFW and allowing them to conduct whatever investigation is necessary.

Cougars will drag large kills to a quiet area and continue to feed for several days at that site (cache). Removing the cached food removes an incentive for the cougar to return or remain nearby.

Considerations

1. Confine birthing animals and young, injured or ill animals in secure predator-resistant secure enclosures.
2. Properly dispose of animal remains, blood, and all materials contaminated with bodily fluids.
3. Identify the disposal methods allowed in your area. Note any fees that may apply.

Emergency animal disposal method	Guidance
Temporary Storage of Carcasses for Transport to Rendering	Preferred safe method; complies with environmental quality and disease control requirements.
Disposal at Permitted Landfills	If rendering capacity is exceeded or suspended, permitted landfilling is the second best method.
On-site Composting	<p>Next best solution if no safe or economical method of transportation to the landfill.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Applies only to animals that died on the owner's property and composted on the same property. - Requires technical expertise, proper equipment, use of materials and methods. - No off-site transportation.
On-Site Burial	<p>Least desirable or environmentally safe method.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Applies only to on-site burial of animals that died on the owner's property and buried on the same property. - Only attempt after consideration of proximity to ground and surface water. - Do not bury animals within 100 feet of a well. - Bury animals in shallow trenches. - Bury large animals no more than two deep, lime the carcasses, then cover with three feet of soil. - Record numbers by type of animals buried, depth of pit, depth of cover, and location.

Safe Handling and Disposal

Use appropriate personal protective gear (e.g. gloves, face mask) to safely handle or contain animal remains for disposal.

- Immediately contain and remove blood, bodily fluids, excretions, or animal parts, including placenta or afterbirth.
- Use a shovel to completely remove all soil, straw, bedding or other contaminated materials.
- Place small carcasses, remains, and materials in a heavy-duty trash bag.
- Double-bag and seal bag with an airproof tie.
- Store double-bagged remains in a secure garage, wildlife-proof enclosure, or freezer (if practical) until bags can be disposed of properly.

Off-Site Disposal

There are strict restrictions to transport and dispose of large animal remains. Fees may apply. Know your options and county or local regulations.

- Licensed rendering plant.
- Licensed collection center.
- Local crematory or pet cemetery.
- Public landfill.
- Animal control agency.
- Licensed large animal veterinarian that offers disposal.
- Animal disease diagnostic laboratory.



Safeguarding People and Cougars

Quick tips for coexistence

Do not feed wildlife. Intentional or unintentional feeding such as leaving pet food outdoors can attract prey animals, which will bring cougars into the area. Feeding wildlife can cause wildlife, including cougars, to come into contact with humans or domestic animals and become accustomed to human presence.

Landscape for safety. Remove dense and low-lying vegetation that may provide cover for carnivores and other wildlife.

Keep pets secure. Don't allow pets to roam unattended. Unsecured pets can become easy prey. Bring them inside or provide secure enclosures.

Keep livestock safe. Securing livestock, exotic animals, and birds in carnivore-resistant barns, pens, or other enclosures (dusk to dawn) can ensure their safety.

Use deterrents. Consider installing motion-sensor lighting around the house and small livestock or pet enclosures.

When recreating

- Walk, hike, bike, or jog with others when possible. Stay alert on trails and make noise as you travel.
- Minimize outdoor activity when cougars are most active—dawn, dusk, night.
- Don't allow pets to roam unattended.
- Keep small children close and within sight.
- Never approach a cougar. Stay calm. Do not run.
- Face the animal, make noise, try to look bigger (e.g. waving arms). Throw objects to scare or distract it.
- Report unusual cougar encounters to your local WDFW office.



To report wildlife incidents or property damage go to:

WDFW Wildlife Incident Reporting System: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/get-involved/report-observations>

Incident reports are routed to WDFW staff based on geographic location or county of incident.

WILDCOMM Communications Center: WILDCOMM@dfw.wa.gov; Call: 360-902-2936 Option 1

To report emergency or poaching

Call 911 to report poaching in progress or an emergency.

Call 877-933-9847 for non-emergency poaching/violation reports.

Send an email to reportpoaching@dfw.wa.gov.

Send a text tip to 847411 (TIP411) by entering WDFWTIP, followed by a space, and then entering your report.

To report sick, injured, or orphaned wildlife

Do not touch or disturb it, please report it to WDFW.

WILDCOMM Communications Center: WILDCOMM@dfw.wa.gov; Call: 360-902-2936 Option 1

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