

Selection and Use of Agents for Using Dogs to Pursue Black Bear or Cougar February 8, 2008

Background

In 1994 Oregonians passed Ballot Measure 18, which outlawed the use of dogs for sport hunting of cougars. Measure 18 provided exceptions for the use of dogs by the department and agents, but the statute did not clearly grant the department authority to designate agents. To clarify this issue, the 2007 Oregon Legislative Assembly enacted HB 2971, which authorizes the department to appoint agents for assistance in their official duties pursuing black bear and/or cougar with dogs subject to the department's direction and control.

Staff will provide draft rules designed to implement HB 2971. The proposed rules detail the application and selection process, describe minimum qualifications and training requirements for agents, and delineate rules regarding their behavior. The proposed rules incorporate direction received from the Commission during their October 12, 2007 and January 11, 2008 meetings. These proposed rules authorize two classes of agents 1) volunteer agents and 2) private contractors hired by the department on personal services contracts, for responding to specific conflict or management actions consistent with the Oregon cougar and bear management plans and/or to work on specific research projects

Bear/Cougar Agent Rules

To implement this statute, the department has developed new rules governing the selection and appointment of agents for assisting with black bear and cougar management when using trained dogs as the most effective tool. The proposed rules detail the application and selection process for agents that will represent the department in its official capacity. The rules also describe the information and training requirements for agents.

The application and selection processes detail the application requirements the department will use to evaluate and select applicants. This information includes such items as experience handling dogs, individual background checks, and driving records. Once selected, appointment of agents will occur via a volunteer agreement or contract.

Before pursuing black bear or cougar on the department's behalf each appointed agent will be required to complete an information and training session conducted by the department. The session will provide information on:

- 1.) Requirements for use of pursuit dogs and related equipment;
- 2.) A code of conduct for agents working on the department's behalf;

- 3.) Methods for humane capture and euthanasia of animals; and
- 4.) Identification of specific areas and boundaries where activities will be conducted for the department.

Usage

These rules do not allow sport hunting of cougars or bears using dogs. What these rules establish is a process by which the department can utilize individuals with specialized skills to address specific management or research needs. Agents would be used to: address specific cougar and bear conflict situations; capture cougar and bear for specific research or management projects; and would allow the department to use agents to conduct management activities such as those prescribed in species plans (e.g. OAR Division 170, Black Bear Management Plan; and OAR Division 180, Cougar Management Plan).

Because many situations requiring the need for using dogs to address conflict with cougars or bear cannot be predicted, individuals selected as agents may seldom be called for work. Agents may be called to assist the department on short notice as situations develop. Any cougar or bear taken using agents will be disposed of as directed by existing rule (OAR Chapter 635, Division 002).

USDA Wildlife Services is available in most areas of the state and would be relied on to address most issues including implementation of target area removals. Reviewing information at the Wildlife District level suggests a maximum of approximately 20 additional agents could meet the current level of conflict in Oregon.