

Agenda Item Summary

BACKGROUND

The initial Oregon Cougar Management Plan (Plan) was developed in 1987 to direct cougar management throughout the state. To the extent practicable, at least once every five years the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) is directed to review the Plan and make recommendations to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) for any changes. Plan updates occurred in 1993 and 2006. Plan implementation summaries have been provided to both the Commission and the Legislature on a regular basis for the last 10 years.

The Plan established five objectives that seek to maintain a viable, healthy cougar population, reduce conflicts with cougars, and manage cougars in a manner compatible with other game mammal species using proactive, adaptive management strategies. Strategies to achieve objectives include the implementation of a zone-based quota system to ensure sustainable harvest levels; estimating population abundance using age/sex/fecundity data from mortalities; monitoring trends in population, damage complaints, and known mortalities; implementing target areas within specific criteria; appointing qualified volunteer agents to assist with research and management activities when needed; and continuing to develop and implement research projects to assist with management decision-making.

Review of the Plan allows for adaptive changes to address new challenges, incorporate new science, and direct new management actions. The goal of the current review and subsequent plan revision is not to re-write the plan but instead streamline it to be more efficient and effective at directing cougar management in Oregon.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

- Two panels of invited stakeholders representing cougar advocacy groups, hunter organizations, and landowner/producer groups provided testimony and written recommendations at the April 22, 2016 Commission meeting. Topics highlighted included identifying the impacts of recreational hunting, threats to long-term population conservation, evaluation of the use and impact of target areas, cougar impacts on game mammals and livestock, and addressing cougar damage and conflict.
- Recent meetings with stakeholders provided greater emphasis and insight into the information they presented at the April Commission meeting. Some stakeholders reemphasized recommendations to eliminate target areas and incorporate new research findings and emphasized a request for the Plan to prioritize additional research projects and to use scientific findings to evaluate removing cougars to increase hunting opportunities. Additional meetings with other stakeholder organizations are in the process of being finalized.

- Informal/impromptu communications occurred with local sporting groups, state agencies, landowner groups, wildlife researchers, and other interested parties.

ISSUE

OREGON COUGAR MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

ANALYSIS

At the instruction of the Commission, the adaptive management process and Target Area management actions will be examined and updated using peer-reviewed literature and results from completed Target Areas. Similarly, expansion of the Target Area effort (i.e. maintenance) will also be explored and considered for inclusion in the adaptive management process. Directives also included exploring techniques for reducing Target Area expenses.

Since Plan adoption in 2006, multiple cougar research projects have been conducted in the western United States. The results of these studies will serve to complement the lengthy body of Oregon cougar research and findings. The Plan will include these new research components, especially findings that clarify and direct current management practices. Oregon-based research projects to incorporate include new genetic analyses related to estimating populations, and findings on cougar-prey relationships and population trends.

**STAFF
RECOMMENDATION**

Informational only. No action requested at this time.

DRAFT MOTION	No action requested at this time.
EFFECTIVE DATE	N/A