

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 Department initiated the Plan evaluation process in April 2016.

The Plan established five objectives that together seek to maintain a viable and 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 update 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.
- Meetings with the stakeholders in late summer 2016 provided greater emphasis and insight into the information they presented at the April Commission meeting.
- The Commission was informed of the primary issues associated with stakeholder review at the October 2016 Commission Meeting and public testimony was received.
- Informal/impromptu communications occurred with local sporting groups, state agencies, landowner groups, wildlife researchers, and other interested parties throughout the entire duration of this process.

ISSUE	EVALUATION AND UPDATE OF THE OREGON COUGAR MANAGEMENT PLAN
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ANALYSIS Cougar research, information collection, and plan guidance has occurred for over 30 years in Oregon. Therefore, Commission recommendations, stakeholder, and public proposed changes to the Oregon Cougar Management Plan incorporated into the Draft Plan have been explicit and direct. Department staff evaluated the Plan for applicability and any shortcomings, incorporated input on key issues, and adapted the Plan to address foreseeable challenges ahead.

As this is an update and not a rewrite, the Draft Plan maintains the pertinent chapters and sections as the current Plan. The Draft Plan differs from the current Plan in the following broad categories:

- 1) Added large amounts of new scientific information related to cougars and their management.
- 2) Updated previous and created new sections with current Oregon-specific cougar data to inform decision making.
- 3) Expanded chapters and sections on cougar management to add depth to past activities and future direction.
- 4) Condensed, combined, or removed outdated and infrequently used chapters and sections to streamline Plan.

The current Plan contains substantial historical information on cougar management and will remain available on the ODFW website.

The current Plan has been quite successful in managing cougars in Oregon; therefore, most of the proposed changes within the Draft Plan are general updates. Other updates incorporate information gathered from continued cougar research and management data to improve future management activities.

The Draft Plan is presented to the Commission as an informational review document and has no associated draft rule.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Informational only. No action requested at this time.

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