

Cougar Management Guidelines for North America

Cougar Network – Special Report

In July 2005, the first edition of Cougar Management Guidelines was published by Opal Creek Press of Salem, Oregon. The concept of Cougar Management Guidelines originated during the sixth Mountain Lion Workshop in San Antonio, Texas, in 2001. At that gathering, several concerned individuals felt that a process was needed to synthesize research results and management experience so that it could be incorporated more quickly into cougar management programs. The best model for such a process was the management guidelines that already existed for other wildlife species, including pronghorn and bighorn sheep. With this in mind, a concerned NGO, Wild Futures, began assembling a working group made up of 13 individuals with long experience in cougar research and/or management. The selected individuals had a cumulative experience of over 200 working years in 10 western states and one Canadian province. Unfortunately, the working group was reduced to 12 members with the untimely death of Ian Ross in an airplane crash during a study of African lions. The newly-published guidelines have been dedicated to the memory of Ian.

Modern cougar research began during the late 1960s with the pioneering work of Maurice Hornocker in Idaho. Studies following Hornocker's

been held, providing opportunities for presentation of papers and reports from the United States and Canada, with some participation from Latin America.

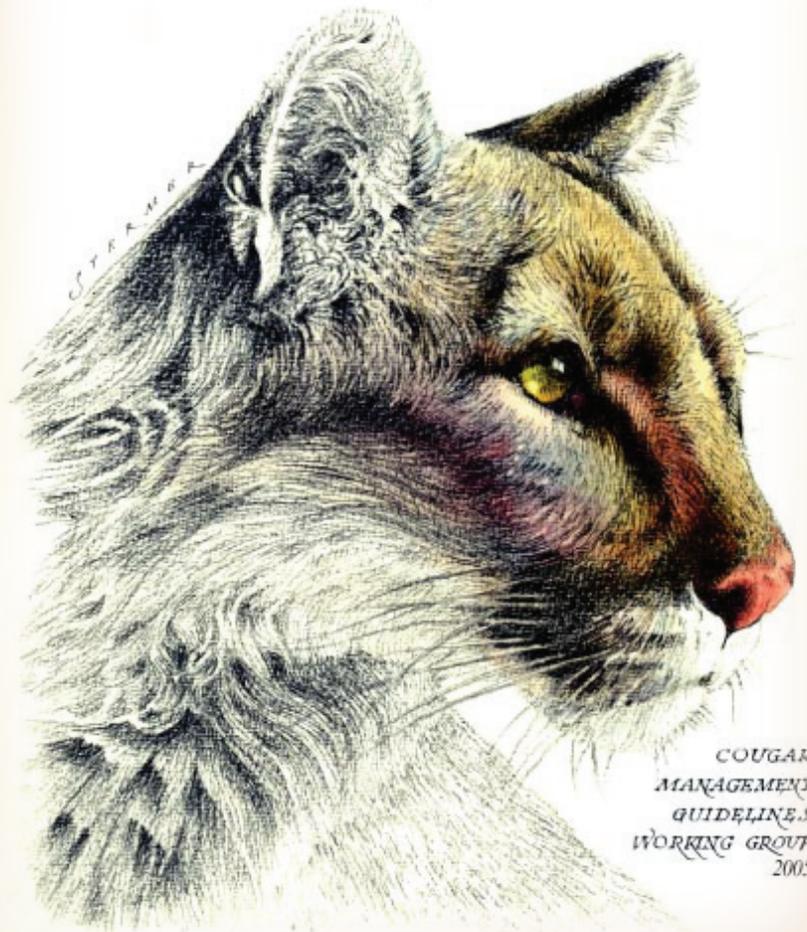
The 1976 workshop had 25 registered participants representing eight western states who carried out informal roundtable reports and discussion over a two-day period. The most recent workshop, held during May 2005, had 149 registered participants representing 20 states, four provinces, and two Mexican states.

While a high percentage of attendees are employed by state and provincial wildlife agencies responsible for cougar management, federal animal damage control and land management agencies are also increasingly present. In addition to governmental representation and increasing numbers of NGO's, those with interests in animal rights, conservation, ranching and hunter/conservation, and legislation also attended.

In addition to presentations at the Mountain Lion Workshops, the number of cougar papers in the Journal of Wildlife Management, The Wildlife Society Bulletin, and the Journal of Mammalogy has grown. While there

(Continued on Next Page)

COUGAR MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES *FIRST EDITION*



example and building upon his procedures expanded into Arizona, California, Utah, and ultimately to virtually every state with extant populations of the species. Between 1976 and 2005, eight Mountain Lion Workshops have

Cougar Management Guidelines for North America

(Continued from Previous Page)

was virtually no published research on cougars in 1965, when Maurice Hornocker undertook his first field study, a plethora of data from a wide geographic base now exists. Within this accumulating information base, harvest strategies and livestock depredation continue to be major management issues, but human attacks, urban cougar occurrences, and seeming expansion of the cougar into the Midwestern United States and Canada are also becoming important.

Cougar Management Guidelines Working Group first met in Boise, Idaho, in October 2002. At the Boise

meeting, the group formulated the initial concept, objectives, and general outline of the guidelines and allocated writing assignments for the chapters.

Once assignments were made, the various individuals or teams wrote first drafts of their chapters. These were then compiled by one member of the workgroup and circulated to the entire group for comment. At this point, a second “cleaning up” was accomplished and the manuscript was sent to a select group outside of the guidelines working group for comment and review. Comments from these reviewers were sent to the individual authors

for consideration and incorporation, and revised chapters were once again compiled. The manuscript was then submitted to a second tier of reviewers, with an emphasis on individuals working for state wildlife agencies responsible for cougar management. One member of the working group made a brief presentation to the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA), notifying them of the groups effort.

WAFWA requested that the workgroup resubmit the current manuscript to several agencies for further review. The group complied with this request, even though it had hoped to go to press in time to have the published guidelines available at the eighth Mountain Lion Workshop in May 2005. Thus, guidelines have

been established as an ongoing process, not a one-time, authoritarian rule book. They are now considered to be a function of the Mountain Lion Workshops, which will be held every three years.

In establishing an approach, the working group recognized that all aspects of cougar management outlined in these guidelines do not apply to each state or province equally. They further recognize that many unknowns and uncertainties about cougars and cougar management exist, and they attempt to present conflicting viewpoints and point out where information is lacking. The group felt that cougar management should be structured on the following principles:

A large-landscape approach, on the order of thousands of square kilometers of well-connected habitat with thriving natural prey populations, is necessary for healthy, self-sustaining cougar populations. This is based upon accumulating research that indicates the following:

1. Cougars are large obligate carnivores that exist in relatively low densities and require large areas to maintain self-sustaining populations (Beier 1996, Logan and Sweanor 2001). Dispersal of most male cougar offspring, a large proportion of female offspring, and immigration of male and female cougars is essential for maintaining cougar populations and for regional gene flow (Beier 1993, Culver et al. 2000, Sweanor et al. 2000, Logan and Sweanor 2001, Ernest et al. 2003, McRae 2004).

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Working Group

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Cougar Management Guidelines for North America

(Continued from Previous Page)

2. Given uncertainties about basic demographic parameters, responses of populations to management prescriptions or hunter selectivity, temporal and spatial variation, and understanding that cougar habitat is changing, cougar management should adopt an adaptive management process.

3. Cougar management should reflect the full array of human values and input from all stakeholders.

4. Funding cougar management programs will always be an issue. Support from other sources will be needed to support management if hunting-based resources are reduced.

With these principles, the guidelines addressed cougar-prey relationships, habitat, assessing populations, depredation, sport hunting, cougar-human conflicts, and research needs. The authors of this first edition envision it mainly as a tool for biologists and administrators responsible for management of cougars. The hope is to bring the available information on the species into mainstream thinking as rapidly as possible, thereby helping to avoid uninformed or inappropriate management decisions.

Copies of the guidelines can be purchased from Opal Creek Press for \$21.95 (Phone: 866-375-9015; email: orders@opalcreekpress.com).

Acknowledgements:

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Maurice Hornocker, Big Creek, Idaho, 1966