



State of California – Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
Director's Office
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GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor
CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director



December 9, 2024

Chair Wendy Thomas
District III County Supervisor
El Dorado County Board of Supervisors
330 Fair Lane
Placerville, CA 95667

The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors
330 Fair Lane
Placerville, CA 95667

Dear Chair Wendy Thomas and Supervisors:

Thank you for your letter dated November 5, 2024, regarding "Statewide Mountain Lion Depredation Approach in El Dorado County." I would also like to thank you for conducting an October 8, 2024, meeting of the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors (Board) where you received an update from your staff on mountain lion issues in El Dorado County (County), comments from me, and public input. I understand how difficult this time has been for the Board, County staff, and residents of the County.

Promptly after the October 8th meeting, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) reached out to County Agricultural Commissioner LeeAnne Mila and County Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) Chair Pat Weddle to schedule follow-up meetings. The earliest date that the Commissioner and Chair were available to meet is December 18, 2024.

I agree with your November 5th letter that "time is of the essence" and while we had hoped to schedule staff-to-staff discussions sooner than the County staff's calendars facilitated, I do anticipate a productive discussion with your staff. The Department's approach to this meeting will embrace the goal that you expressed in your letter to me to begin "immediately designing short-term and long-term solutions that will enable us to safely coexist with our natural surroundings." Since this summer, the Department's North Central Regional Manager Morgan Kilgour and Law Enforcement Assistant Chief Erica Manes have met regularly with the Commissioner to discuss areas of ongoing collaboration. I encourage us to keep building on this progress.

Conserving California's Wildlife Since 1870

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We continue to build a relationship with your Commission, which requested that Department staff attend and present at their November 27, 2024, public meeting. We did participate and again found the Commission's engagement and process to be helpful at finding common ground on these issues.

I appreciate your public support and the commitments you made during your October 8th Board meeting on these matters. I believe your personal leadership will make a significant difference in both improving the on-the-ground management of human-wildlife conflicts in the County as well as improving the institutional relationships between County staff and Department staff.

The Board's meeting minutes for the October 8th meeting state that a motion was made and seconded to "[d]irect staff to create an aggressive no deer feeding campaign." The Department is encouraged that the County has made progress to strengthen the County ordinance to include a ban on deer feeding and is working with the Department's Law Enforcement Division on enforcement. I ask that your staff provide us with an update on any further progress and community reaction.

As discussed during your October 8th Board meeting, the Department believes that there are likely many factors contributing to the current human-wildlife conflict in the County related to mountain lions. For example, deer feeding in the County is one likely contributing factor as is the Department's management approach. It is important to facilitate an open and candid evaluation of all possible contributing factors to truly improve the outcomes. The solutions should be comprehensive, not isolated to only one potential factor.

Some of the data referenced in your November 5th letter and data included in the Commissioner's presentation at the Board meeting are not reflected in the Department's data. Notwithstanding repeated requests made by Department staff, County staff continue to reference data that is unknown to the Department. Examples include County records for the number and type of registered animals, the number and type of registered animals the County believe have been killed by mountain lions in 2024, and the reported length of time which the Department takes to issue permits. This makes collaboration more difficult. Truly improving management must be a two-way street and absent the sharing of critical information it is unlikely a comprehensive approach can be developed.

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We request that your staff increase their willingness to share critical data with us so that we can solve problems together. If County staff consider any of this data not to be public information, there are mechanisms we can use to protect existing privileges while still sharing the information. Counties often ask the Department to share information, which requires maintaining legal protections.

According to Department records, since January 2024, depredation permits have been issued within 24 hours in El Dorado County, most within the same day as the report. We are aware of two known exceptions to this fact, and those two exceptions stem from the permits requiring additional information from the responsible party prior to permit issuance. In the case of those two exceptions, Department staff were able to issue those permits within 48 hours of initial reporting. If County staff believe these facts to be inaccurate, it would be very useful to have that discussion and share data to the contrary during the December meeting that is scheduled.

At the December staff meeting, we also hope to define our shared collaborative commitments. We believe this should include a shared commitment and investment to:

- collect DNA from mountain lions to conduct a "cluster" analysis whenever possible from scat, hair, or blood samples at depredation sites and have County trappers provide samples to the Department;
- collar mountain lions with assistance from local entities and then aggressively haze animals to shift behavior and also to gather scientific data about the effectiveness of doing so;
- design a methodology to assess data on human presence and expansion contributing to habitat fragmentation and lion migration impacts at the County level;
- develop a program to assist residents in electronic and other predator aversion practices; and,
- collaborate with County staff to plan and conduct workshops across the County.

Finally, the Department will be prepared to discuss with your staff an approach to facilitate expediting depredation permits in the situations where the involved landowner or property owner has already taken all reasonable steps to prevent conflict.

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The Department hopes the December 18, 2024, meeting with the County's Agricultural Commissioner and Commission Chair will result in a commitment for communication, collaboration, and data collection to improve our understanding of mountain lions in El Dorado County and to develop best practices for minimizing conflict.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "CH Bonham", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Charlton H. Bonham
Director

cc: LeeAnne Mila
Agricultural Commissioner
El Dorado County
330 Fair Lane
Placerville, CA 95667

Patrick Weddle, Chair
El Dorado County Fish and Wildlife
Commission, District IV
330 Fair Lane
Placerville, CA 95667