

COUNTY OF EL DORADO

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October 8, 2024

Director Chuck Bonham
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
715 P Street
Sacramento, Ca. 94244

Re: Statewide Mountain Lion Depredation Approach in El Dorado County

On July 10th, 2020 CDFW implemented a change in how depredation permits were being administered statewide. A policy was implemented in 2017 for the Santa Monica Mountains and the Santa Anna Mountains. This policy was further expanded in March of 2020 to a larger area of the state encompassing roughly an area from San Francisco to the Mexico border. In July the depredation approach was further expanded to all other areas outside of those boundaries. The approach outlined the process at length in the July 10, 2020 memorandum issued by Staff, but the key principles are in the first bullet points:

1. Upon request from a property owner that has suffered a livestock loss, a non-lethal Step 1 permit shall be issued – consistent with Fish and Game Code section 4801.5 – shall be issued that authorizes some element(s) of non-lethal take (e.g., pursuit, catch or capture or the attempt to pursue, catch or capture) along with protective enclosures or actions to protect livestock.
2. Should the property owner suffer a second loss and has implemented the non-lethal take measures authorized, the Regional Manager should analyze and determine whether additional non-lethal take measures and recommendations should be pursued, and, if so, issue a second non-lethal permit. If not, the Regional Manager documents when a second non-lethal permit is not feasible, then the Regional Manager has the discretion to either: (a) use a structured process to consider translocation; or (b) issue a lethal permit upon confirmation the property owner wishes to receive such a permit.

The implementation of this new policy dramatically changed mountain lion dynamics in El Dorado County. Prior to this implementation the mountain lion population in El Dorado County was being managed to prevent human mountain lion conflicts, allowing

coexistence. Data from 2001 to present clearly shows our depredation permit requests versus mountain lions taken fluctuated, creating a managed population without hurting the overall distribution of these apex predators. As our El Dorado County Fish and Wildlife has written in their opinion on human/cougar conflict, implementation of this policy should be “considered as an experiment that has failed in high conflict counties as depredations have increased”. Clearly El Dorado is a high conflict county with the most depredation permits issued. El Dorado County accounts for 17% of all permits issued for the period 2019-2023.

This CDFW management policy for Mountain Lions has put El Dorado County into crisis mode. Unprecedented numbers of livestock and domestic animals have been killed since the policy direction was given. Increasing human interactions with mountain lions that include stalking, school sightings, and the most tragic, a human death have occurred. We cannot continue on this trajectory. The county is concerned that this policy is inducing the high likelihood of another human attack. That cannot be the pathway that CDFW wants to follow.

A return to managing conflict as prior to the 2020 policy is warranted. We request that the policy be set aside for El Dorado and a plan dealing with our high levels of conflict and depredation be implemented. Permits should be implemented in a timely fashion, not days or weeks after the occurrence. It should not be tied to a specific parcel, but an area. We need an organized approach with defined parameters that, when met, a lethal depredation permit shall be issued. The process should be timely and consistent and not be subject to the varying interpretations of the CDFW staff contacted about a particular incident on any given day. We need to look at proactive hazing as an approach to help dishabituate cougars.

Sincerely,

Wendy Thomas
Chair, El Dorado County Board of Supervisors