

Information Crossfile

COUGAR MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES PUBLISHED

In 2001, WildFutures—a nonprofit that works to advance carnivore and ecosystem protection—received funding to organize a meeting of invited scientists and conservation experts to discuss the state of cougar (*Felis concolor*) management. During this meeting, participants committed to producing detailed management guidelines that would help state, federal, and other wildlife and land management agencies. Thirteen participants from this meeting formed the Cougar Management Guidelines Working Group. These individuals have more than 200 years of combined experience in cougar research, management, and conservation. The group compiled and reviewed all published literature on cougars, as well as many unpublished works. These individuals wrote the guidelines and sought and incorporated comments and edits from wildlife agencies in many states and provinces where cougars occur.

After three years of collaboration and painstaking review by the group and other experts throughout North America, the first edition of *Cougar Management Guidelines* is now available from Opal Creek Press at www.opalcreekpress.com/cougar.html or by calling 866-375-9015; the cost is \$21.95. The Cougar Management Guidelines Working Group considers the publication a “living document,” hence its release as a “first edition,” and plans to incorporate new data and methodologies as they become available.

The eight-chapter, 137-page book is a state-of-the-art guide for cougar management in the United States, Mexico, and Canada. The comprehensive document includes a historical perspective on cougar management and policies in North America and covers the topics of

cougar-prey relationships, cougar habitat, assessing cougar populations, policies and guidance for managing cougar depredations, recommendations for managing cougar sport hunting, strategies to manage human-cougar conflicts, and cougar research priorities. Although the primary audience of the publication is wildlife managers, many others such as field biologists, decision makers, educators, and representatives of private organizations who are interested in cougar management and conservation will also find the volume useful because it summarizes and distills decades of research into a series of succinct, rigorous guidelines. The 13 authors of *Cougar Management Guidelines* believe this document will make a substantial contribution toward conservation of this carnivore and management of the growing incidence of human-cougar conflicts. Reviewers—including Stephen Herrero, professor emeritus of environmental science at the University of Calgary, and David Mech, senior scientist with the U.S. Geological Survey—enthusiastically endorse the book’s thoroughness and relevance.

One of the book’s coauthors is Terry Hofstra, chief of Resource Management and Science at Redwood National and State Parks in Orick, California. Hofstra’s first serious involvement in cougar management issues began in 1994 when he was struck by a family’s report of an encounter with a cougar on one of the park’s most popular trails. Up to that point, observations of cougars had been infrequent with no reports of people feeling threatened. This report was different and began a series of similar incidents within a short period. Visitors described cougars as not leaving trails or moving in the vegetation near trails. They also noted cougars howling, hissing, and snarling, and a jogger communicated being stalked. Park managers closed the trail where both visitors and staff had made these observations; however, Terry recalls thinking, “Now what?” As he and other park staff at Redwood discussed their options, they realized that their knowledge and understanding of cougars was very poor. Moreover, as they made inquiries, they clearly saw that they were not alone. Park staffs throughout the West were having similar experiences and struggling with the



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same questions: How should the National Park Service respond to such reports? What level of risk to humans do the reported cougar behaviors pose? Why did this activity seem to start suddenly?

To address concerns about cougar-human interactions, Redwood National and State Parks and the Cooperative Park Studies Unit of the National Biological Service (now the USGS Biological Resource Discipline) organized a workshop at the University of California, Davis, in July 1994. Participants from government, academia, and wildlife institutes distilled existing information about interpreting observable cougar behaviors: What exactly are humans likely to observe when they encounter a cougar? More importantly, how should park managers interpret those behaviors? A summary of the workshop was published as Moorhead and Hofstra (1994). A follow-up workshop in December of that year identified top-priority cougar research questions, and in spring 1995, Hofstra drafted rudimentary guidelines to help park managers understand cougar ecology and interpret and respond to cougar-human interactions. In 1998, with Natural Resource Preservation Program funding, the National Park Service and California State Parks researched cougar distribution and habitat use in relation to human activities at Redwood National and State Parks. This work was carried out in partnership with the USGS Yosemite Field Station, Humboldt State University, and the Hornocker Wildlife Institute at the University of Idaho. These efforts represent an important start in the development of science-based management of cougars in the National Park System.

Hofstra believes the new *Cougar Management Guidelines* is just what managers needed 10 years ago: “If a resource like this had been available when cougar-human encounters were on the rise in parks, I believe we would have felt a lot better. This document neither dictates policy nor prescribes management actions, but provides a baseline of scientific information with suggestions for managers to consider in light of the issues facing them at their own parks.” Published in July, the book has already sold about 500 copies, 175 of which have gone to staff at mostly western units of the National Park System. Any proceeds will help fund a follow-up second edition that will incorporate new information as management actions are tried and refined in the field.

References

- Cougar Management Guidelines Working Group. 2005. Cougar management guidelines. First edition. WildFutures, Bainbridge Island, Washington.
- Moorhead, B., and T. Hofstra. 1994. Western park personnel meet on mountain lion-human encounters. *Park Science* 14(4):20–21.