Cougars and Bears in the Cross Hairs

West Coast residents have demonstrated their compassion in recent years by supporting ballot initiatives to ban cruel and unsporting hunting practices. In 1990, California voters approved Proposition 117—which banned the trophy hunting of cougars—and thereby extended a hunting prohibition that had been in place since 1971. In 1994, Oregon voters approved Measure 18, banning hound hunting of black bears and cougars and bear baiting.

These victories stung hunters, who have long coveted the heads and hides of bears and cougars as prized trophies. So hunters have struck back. In Oregon, state legislators acting on behalf of the hunting lobby pushed forth more than 10 bills to repeal, damage, or delay Measure 18 in 1995. Fortunately, all the bills failed.

Fresh Attacks by the Hunting Lobby

Now, the hunting lobby in Oregon has launched an initiative of its own to not only repeal Measure 18, but also provide the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission with exclusive authority to set wildlife policy in the state. The commission has long been dominated by hunters. And the hunting lobby wants to solidify its interests by concentrating all the power in the hands of the Commission’s seven political appointees. However, they must gather 72,000 signatures of registered voters by July to qualify the measure for the November 1996 ballot.

In California, the hunters’ counter-attack has been similarly furious. Recently, the Legislature approved a bill to refer the hunting issue back to the ballot. Proposition 197 is a cleverly worded measure that purports to protect the public from cougars, but is really just a formula for restoring the trophy hunting of the animals in California (see the sidebar on pages 2 and 3 for facts about cougars and public safety). A public vote is scheduled for March 26, 1996.

In Washington state, The HSUS is
Coming off the offensive. There, in cooperation with other humane and environmental organizations, we are launching a ballot initiative to ban bear baiting and hound hunting of black bears, cougars, and bobcats. To qualify for the November ballot, the measure must attract 180,000 signatures of registered voters in 150 days between February and July.

Pacific Coast states are the key battleground for bears, cougars, and bobcats in the nation in 1996. We are asking all HSUS members to become involved in these campaigns. Let the legislators know once and for all that West Coast citizens want to protect beautiful wild animals like bears and cougars from cruel hunting practices.

**The Ballot or the Bullet?**

It is likely that the citizens of California, Oregon, and Washington will have an opportunity to determine whether the trophy hunting of predators should be permitted. The HSUS urges all citizens to vote during these elections. If you would like to become involved, please contact us at the WCRO of The HSUS and we will involve you in the campaigns.

**California**

Ballot Number: Proposition 197

Vote Date: March 26, 1996

Content: Under the guise of public safety, the measure would allow the state to sanction trophy hunting of mountain lions.

**HSUS position:** Vote “NO” on Proposition 197

**Oregon**

Ballot Number: Undetermined. Supporters must gather signatures by July 1996.

**Provisional Vote Date:** November 1996.

Content: Bans bear baiting, bans hound hunting of bears, cougars, and bobcats.

**HSUS position:** Assist in gathering signatures. Vote “YES” in November 1996.

California residents are urged to use the enclosed postcards to help defeat Proposition 197 and ensure that cougars will continue to be protected from hunters’ guns.

**Hounding Them to Death**

“There is a strong perception that houndsmen abuse the rules of fair chase routines, the issue of radio-collars on dogs, and many pet owners seek results in a tarnished image. The perception is the reality.”


In 1995, a Utah jury convicted a group of hunting guides for chasing cougars with dogs, illegally roping and choking the animals, and then releasing them into areas where out-of-state clients could shoot them in a guaranteed kill situation. For these “canned” hunts, they charged their clients thousands of dollars per cat.

Though the Utah hunt was particularly atrocious, it is not unlike many lawful hunting practices that routinely occur throughout the West.

**Bear Baiting: Anything But Sporting**

State fish and wildlife agencies implore citizens not to feed wildlife—and for good reasons. Animals habituated to human food sources are likely to raid garbage cars, be labeled as “nuisances,” and then killed.

The no-feeding admonition applies to almost all citizens—except bear baiters, that is. Washington allows hunters to dump rotting meats, fruits, vegetables, honey, and grease in barrels or simply in heaps to attract bears. The bears gorge on these foods, and return frequently to the bait sites. The hunters—often concealed behind blinds or hiding in trees—will then wait for the trophy specimens of their choice to come along and shoot the feeding animals.

Bear baiting is simply unsporting. The baiting of deer, elk, or pronghorn antelope is prohibited in western states—including Washington. If the HSUS believes the same standards should apply to bears. Colorado and Oregon have recently banned bear baiting by public vote. Only 10 states—including Washington—allow this archaic and unsporting practice.

**Cougars and Public Safety**

In northern California, on December 3, 1995, a turkey hunter barely escaped a jaunt in the woods with his life. A cougar mauled him while a second lion looked on. An in effort to parry the attack, the hunter shot the animal, who had sunk his teeth into his foot. He shot and drove the cat away, but also shot himself in the foot. The hunter survived the attack.

It sounds like a harrowing story, played to headlines in major newspapers throughout California. One problem, though. Subsequent investigations by the Department of Fish and Game. It turns out the hunter who treated the hunter failed to turn up any evidence to support the story. While officials stepped short of calling it a hoax, it may be that the hunter shot himself in the foot and tried not only to cover up his embarrassing act, but also to heap some bad publicity on California’s much-maligned cougars.

During the Measure 18 fight in Oregon, a hunter in that state also appeared to have shot a cougar attack story. Not a shred of evidence turned up to support the contention.

Such stories raise serious questions not only about the veracity of alleged cougar attacks, but also about the reliability of data from state fish and game agencies that purport to show an increase in sightings and encounters between people and cougars.

Indeed, cougars are powerful animals and do have the ability to harm people. In California in 1994, lions were responsible for two human deaths—the first fatalities in that state from lions since 1908. But it is important to keep the threat from lions in proper perspective.

• Cougar attacks are extremely rare. In all of North America, there have been 13 fatal attacks and 53 non-fatal attacks during the past 100 years. For every person killed by a cougar over the last century, there have been over 1200 people killed by lightning, more than 1100 people killed in hunting-related accidents, and over 300 killed by bees.

• Hunting does nothing to deter the very remote risk of a cougar attack. Half of all cougar attacks in North America, for example, have occurred on Vancouver Island, British Columbia—one of the most heavily hunted areas on the continent.

• Trophy hunting in particular does nothing to protect public safety. Hunters often target the largest adult male cats. Large male cougars are least likely to be involved in encounters with people. Juvenile cats of either sex—are least likely to be targeted by hunters—are most likely to be involved in conflicts with people as they struggle to establish new territories for themselves.

• The California law banning trophy hunting of cougars and the Oregon law banning hound hunting still allow the killing of problem cats to ensure public safety.

Cougars and bears stand little chance against the hounds, sophisticated radio tracking devices, and firearms of today’s hunters.

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Cougars and bears stand little chance against the hounds, sophisticated radio tracking devices, and firearms of today’s hunters.

Typically, a hunter will release a pack of hounds fitted with radio collars in hot pursuit of a bear, cougar, or bobcat. The pursued animal will often turn and fight the dogs, resulting in bloody fights. Eventually, the frightened bear or cat will climb a tree to seek refuge. When the hounds reach this stationary point, the hunter picks up the radio signal and knows that the animal has been trapped. He can then follow the signal, walk to the base of the tree, and shoot the exhausted and frightened animal from point-blank range.

It’s about as sporting as shooting a lion in a cage at a zoo.

_Cougars and Public Safety_ in the United States | WCRO Regional Report
Director's Report

By Eric Sakach,
Director of
The HSUS
West Coast
Regional Office

Vote “NO” on 197—Your Vote is Crucial!

This March, California voters will once again be asked to decide whether cougars should be protected from trophy hunters. It will be a battle of fact versus emotional appeal to be sure, because the proponents of Proposition 197 have pulled the biggest emotional weapon out of their political arsenal—that of public safety. I’d like to share with you some of the facts.

Just six years ago, the majority of Californians voted to continue a ban on the hunting of mountain lions, a ban that has been in place since a moratorium was established in 1971. Then, because the proponents of Proposition 117 were allowed to place the ballot in 1990. Proposition 117 was a decisive victory for California’s predators over the wants of trophy hunters, and it should have put the matter to rest.

Sadly, as a result of two human deaths attributed to the big cats in 1994, the issue has risen again. Under the guise of “public safety,” the DFG has determined that it needs the help of trophy hunters to “manage” mountain lions. Certainly, while these fatal encounters are tragic for the victims and their families, and my heart goes out to them, we should not lose sight of the fact that cougar attacks on people are extremely rare.

There have been only 6 confirmed attacks on people since 1990, and the 2 deaths were the first in California since 1909. In fact, there have been only 13 fatal cougar attacks in all of North America in the last 100 years. To put the figures in perspective, know that for every fatal cougar attack in the last 100 years, over 300 people have been killed by bees. Additionally, many Californians have moved into what was, and still is, prime cougar habitat. It isn’t surprising that more people are reporting sightings as they move into areas where cougars live. And when pets and livestock live in these same areas, it shouldn’t be at all surprising when they attract unwanted attention from predators, especially if left unguarded outdoors. It’s important to note that the law already permits the killing of any cougar who is perceived as a threat to livestock or public safety.

The truth is, the “threat to public safety” argument just doesn’t add up. Proposition 197 is, in reality, a deceptive measure that will overturn the 1990 voter-approved ban on trophy hunting of cougars. The majority of people in California have already made it clear that they value the lives of cougars and other large predators over trophies. Don’t be swayed now by deceptive tactics.

Reflect for a moment...

How can I help animals and receive income and tax savings at the same time?

By making a planned gift to The Humane Society of the United States, you can assure that animals will receive the protection they need while providing significant tax savings and income to you. Naming The HSUS as a beneficiary of your estate or trust demonstrates your lasting commitment to animal welfare and strengthens the society for future tasks. We will be happy to send our latest information on planned giving and our programs to help animals.

Mail this coupon in the envelope provided or send directly to HSUS West Coast Regional Office, P.O. Box 417220, Sacramento, CA 95841-7220.

Name _____________________
Address ___________________
City ____________________ Zip ______
Phone __________

Contacting WCRO

Write: HSUS West Coast
Regional Office
P.O. Box 417220
Sacramento, CA 95841-7220

Call: (916) 344-1710
Fax: (916) 344-1808

California Residents: Use the Enclosed Postcards to Stop Proposition 197

Enclosed with this report are three postcards. Please address them to friends, family members, business colleagues, or others you know and send them along with a personal signature from you. If every HSUS member in California does this, we can influence hundreds of thousands of voters.