

## Property Assessment Guide

The purpose of the Property Assessment Guide is to aid residents and property owners in understanding what features attract wildlife, evaluating the habitat present on their land, and learning what Best Management Practice(s) would be most beneficial for their situation. Assessing the flora (plant-life and nutrition for herbivores), fauna (animals), water supply, landscape, and other components of the environment, will enable property managers to take the necessary steps to protect domestic animals and live responsibly alongside wildlife.

### Step 1: Understanding what Attracts Wildlife

Animals have three basic needs: food, water, and shelter. If a property supplies certain types of these necessities it is inviting in a variety of wild neighbors. Although some people are not concerned with inhabitants such as birds, rabbits, and deer (and may even want them on their property), attracting any type of wildlife opens the door for all species. This includes bears, bobcats, mountain lions, and coyotes. These predators are simply following their food source, but unwanted encounters with people, pets and livestock may occur as a result.

**Food** – Evaluate the food sources present on your property. It may be helpful to consider what is available during each season, making special note of those present during the winter months when native plants tend to offer less nutrients to hungry wildlife. Supplying food in the winter may be more tempting to wildlife because natural food is harder to find and more competitive to consume.

#### From Vegetation

- |                                      |                                                |                                  |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Berries        | <input type="radio"/> Foliage (leaves & twigs) | <input type="radio"/> Fruit      |
| <input type="radio"/> Nectar/Flowers | <input type="radio"/> Nuts                     | <input type="radio"/> Pollen     |
| <input type="radio"/> Seeds          | <input type="radio"/> Tree Sap                 | <input type="radio"/> Vegetables |

#### From People (could be intentional or accidental)

- |                                               |                                          |                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Bird or Squirrel Feeder | <input type="radio"/> Pet/Livestock Food | <input type="radio"/> Compost Bin |
| <input type="radio"/> Unsecured Garbage       | <input type="radio"/> Vegetable Garden   | <input type="radio"/> Salt Lick   |

#### Prey Species (food for predatory animals)

- |                                     |                                     |                                       |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Alpacas       | <input type="radio"/> Cattle        | <input type="radio"/> Deer            |
| <input type="radio"/> Domestic Cats | <input type="radio"/> Domestic Dogs | <input type="radio"/> Donkey          |
| <input type="radio"/> Feral Cats    | <input type="radio"/> Fox           | <input type="radio"/> Fowl            |
| <input type="radio"/> Goats         | <input type="radio"/> Llamas        | <input type="radio"/> Mule            |
| <input type="radio"/> Opossums      | <input type="radio"/> Pigs          | <input type="radio"/> Raccoons        |
| <input type="radio"/> Rodents       | <input type="radio"/> Sheep         | <input type="radio"/> Snakes/Reptiles |
| <input type="radio"/> Song Birds    | <input type="radio"/> Others: _____ |                                       |

**Water** – Consider all the sources of water available on your property. Also, indicate which sources are available year round (reliable to plants and animals), and/or which ones are supplied during the dryer summer months.

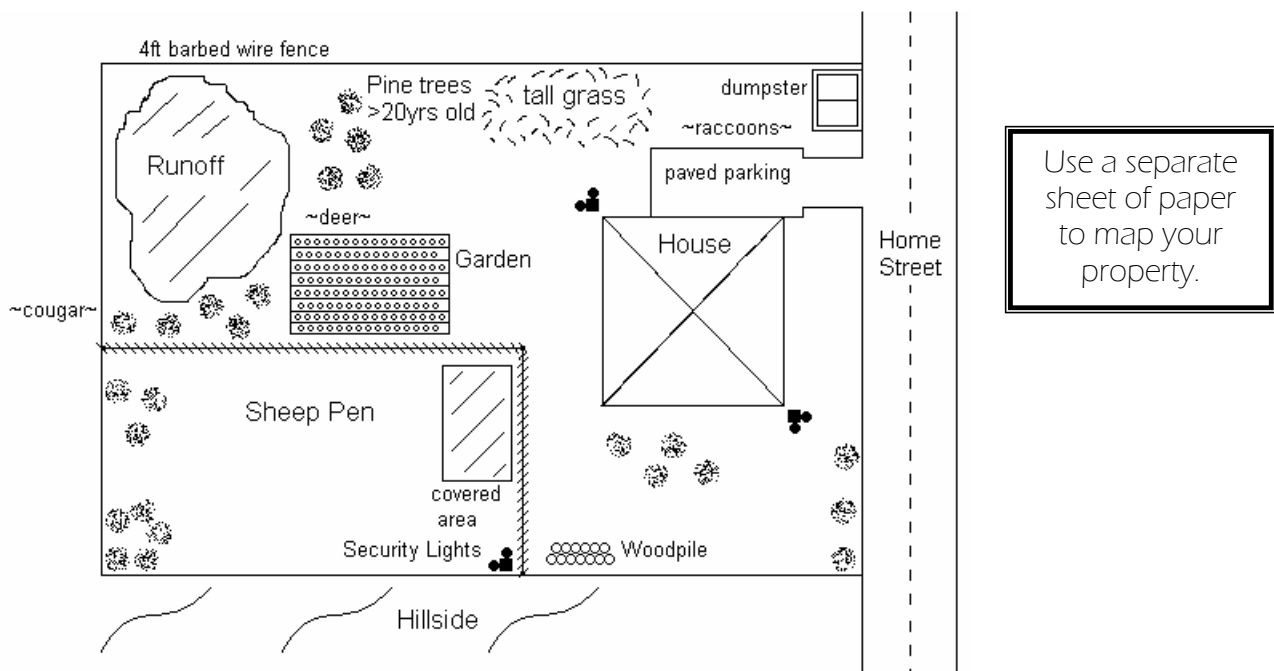
- |                                         |                                   |                                         |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Birdbath/Fountain | <input type="radio"/> Flood Plain | <input type="radio"/> Hose/Sprinklers   |
| <input type="radio"/> Irrigation        | <input type="radio"/> Lake/Pond   | <input type="radio"/> Pet Bowls/Troughs |
| <input type="radio"/> River/Stream      | <input type="radio"/> Spring      | <input type="radio"/> Swimming Pool     |
| <input type="radio"/> Other: _____      |                                   |                                         |

**Shelter** – Note the various places on your property where animals might seek refuge during the day, night, or to raise their young. These features may change throughout the year as well. Consider what your property offers that surrounding areas are lacking, such as tall trees or woodpiles.

- |                                                               |                                   |                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Abandoned Structure (shed, barn, attic) | <input type="radio"/> Cave        | <input type="radio"/> Brush/Shrubs       |
| <input type="radio"/> Burrow/Hollow                           | <input type="radio"/> Large Trees | <input type="radio"/> Dead/Hollow Trees  |
| <input type="radio"/> Forest Area                             | <input type="radio"/> Nesting Box | <input type="radio"/> Ground Cover/Mulch |
| <input type="radio"/> Meadow                                  | <input type="radio"/> Wood Pile   | <input type="radio"/> Pond               |
| <input type="radio"/> Rock Pile                               |                                   | <input type="radio"/> Other: _____       |

### Step 2: Habitat Evaluation - Mapping Landscape and Inventory

Please take a moment to sketch a map of your property. Be sure to indicate which areas have roads, trees, slopes, streams, ponds, shrubs, wood piles, fences, security lights, sheds, and any other noticeable or unique features. Make note of where you keep domestic animals and anywhere you have seen signs of wildlife (i.e. seeing the animal, tracks, droppings, dens, etc). It may also be beneficial to include features of the neighboring properties such as woods, highways, rivers, pastures and fences. Basic example:



**Observations** – Record the wildlife and incidents you have observed. If possible, indicate the locations on your property map. The following check lists are intended to help you establish your level of risk for wildlife conflicts.

In my individual backyard/property:

- I have livestock:
- |                                                   |                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Unenclosed at all times     | <input type="radio"/> Breeding/birthing their young |
| <input type="radio"/> Corralled at all times      | <input type="radio"/> Corralled only at night       |
| <input type="radio"/> Fully enclosed at all times | <input type="radio"/> Fully enclosed only at night  |

I have pets that:

- Remain inside the house or in pen/enclosure all day & night
- Have outdoor access at all times
- Stay inside just at night

My pet/livestock enclosure has:

- A door that locks
- Covered/closable windows
- No openings larger than 4"x 4"
- A roof
- Fencing on all sides

\*if you checked all 5 of these boxes you probably have a secure enclosure

I live in/on a:

- Flatland
- Known Wildlife Corridor
- Residential area
- Forest/dense trees
- Large City
- Rural Town
- Hillside
- Ranch/ette
- Valley

### In my neighborhood:

There have been sightings of:

- Bear
- Loose domestic dogs
- Opossum
- Bobcat
- Fox
- Raccoon
- Coyote
- Mountain lion
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Residents have:

- Unprotected pets/livestock
- Requested a depredation permit from DFG
- Lost domestic animals to predators

There are noticeable changes in development/environment in the last 5 years:

- Drought
- Increased logging
- More snowfall
- Rivers dammed
- New commercial buildings
- Increased deer population
- Decreased deer population
- Wild habitat destroyed
- Floods
- New homes built
- Road expansions
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Step 3: Solutions – Best Management Practices

**Deter Prey** – Mountain lions primarily eat deer but will also eat smaller mammals. To detract mountain lions from your property, try to remove any food source that attracts the lion's prey (therefore removing what attracts the lion). These tips may be helpful to discourage wildlife:

- ◇ Never intentionally feed deer; this practice is illegal in California.
- ◇ Avoid unintentionally feeding wildlife (pick up fallen tree fruit, clean BBQ grills, etc)
- ◇ Landscape with deer-resistant plants (see the DFG's Guide to Preventing Deer Damage at <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/keepmewild/docs/gardenersguide.pdf> )
- ◇ Enclose fruit or vegetable gardens with eight-foot fencing, or use deer-proof fencing
- ◇ Install motion-sensitive lighting around the house and garden
- ◇ Consider using commercially prepared deer repellents

**Protect Domestic Animals** - Predators are opportunistic and will take advantage of an easy meal if presented with one. Domestic pets and livestock are much easier to kill than wild prey.

By securing your animals you are keeping them safe and also forcing predators to hunt their native food. This benefits everyone because when predators feed on domestic animals instead of wild prey, not only are pets/livestock lives lost, but the natural food-chain and balance in the ecosystem are often disrupted. Be responsible and remove your animals from the food-chain. Here are some tips to get started:

- ◇ Secure pets and livestock in fully-enclosed structures, especially between dusk and dawn when predators are most actively hunting
- ◇ Trim back overgrown brush around your home and livestock enclosures, these are hiding places for predators
- ◇ Accompany small children and pets outdoors, especially between dusk and dawn
- ◇ Remove the smell of blood – destroy afterbirth, enclose bleeding, injured and newborn animals
- ◇ Install frightening devices – motion or timer lighting, noises, and/or sprinklers

Please take the time to review your checklists and answers on this Property Assessment Guide. Notice where, when and how you may be attracting wildlife onto your property. Is there a simple solution to keeping domestic animals safe and allowing us to coexist with wildlife in the Central Sierra? What wildlife-attracting characteristics can you remove from your property? What structures can you alter or build to protect pets and livestock and keep out predators? Are there steps your neighbors should be taking as well? Would members of your community benefit from what you know and what you have learned? Consider these questions and please visit the Mountain Lion Foundation's homepage for information on integrating Best Management Practices into your routine, and with any questions or comments.