

Survival and Ages of Cougars Harvested After Cougar Hunting With Dogs Was Banned in Oregon

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ABSTRACT Cougar (*Puma concolor*) management changed in Oregon when Ballot Measure 18 passed in 1994, making it unlawful to use dogs for cougar hunting. In addition to Ballot Measure 18, several other changes were made that impacted cougar management in the state. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) Commission changed cougar hunting from controlled hunts with a limited number of hunters having access to trained dogs, to a statewide season with unlimited tags beginning in 1995. The hunting season was also expanded from 2 ½ to 4 months in 1994, and then to 7 months in 1995. The Oregon Legislature reduced the price of a cougar tag from \$50.00 to \$10.00 in 1997. Also in 1997, the Sport Pac license was developed for Oregon residents and it included a cougar tag with purchase of the license package. By 2001, the general cougar hunting season had been expanded to 10 months within the calendar year. ODFW also instituted a quota-based system of harvest management. Beginning in 2005, hunters could harvest a second cougar in all of eastern Oregon.

Data will be presented from a statewide perspective and also from three intensive research studies conducted within the state. We will discuss changes to survival and ages of cougars harvested in response to the initiative that banned using dogs to hunt cougars. Additionally, we will discuss statutory and regulatory changes implemented since 1994 that have affected cougar management in Oregon. Initially, cougar harvest declined after the use of dogs was prohibited. In recent years, although cougar harvest has increased to levels observed prior to 1994, the proportion of total statewide cougar mortality caused by hunters has declined. Concurrent with the decline in harvest, the proportion of total cougar mortality attributed to hunting fell below 50% of the total known mortality for several years. Age composition of the harvest has also changed. With dogs available for hunting, hunters took mostly older male cougars, whereas without the use of dogs, the median age of cougars taken by hunters has declined. Overall annual survival appears higher now compared to when dogs were used to hunt cougars. However, numbers of cougars illegally killed may have increased.