

STATE OF PUMAS IN THE WEST: HEADING TOWARDS OVERKILL?

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Abstract: Extraordinarily asocial, at times fiercely territorial and secretive, mountain lions (*Puma concolor*) are subjected to liberal hunting and trapping regulations in western states—they are afforded few protections in the states where they persist. Yet, little population data exist. Although highly charismatic and important in top-down ecosystem regulation, few governmental or nongovernmental entities expend resources to protect, much less study them because of the expense. Add to that, growth and sprawl and roads contribute to their direct or indirect mortality. States must take steps to protect mountain lions in the near future to avoid their extirpation. Between 1982 and 2003, western states showed a four-fold increase in sport hunter lion kills across the West. The upward trend is particularly noteworthy in Idaho, Colorado, Utah, and Montana for the years 1997 to 2001—although both Colorado and Montana have recently taken steps to curb hunting quotas. The upward trend is particularly noteworthy in Idaho, Colorado, Utah, and Montana for the years 1997 to 2001—although both Colorado and Montana have recently taken steps to curb hunting quotas. In contrast, most other western states (Arizona, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Washington) through politically appointed wildlife commissions or through state legislatures, seek higher hunter-induced puma kills. States achieve these results through permissive hunting regulations such as inexpensive hunting tags, increasing the length of the hunting season, and liberalizing the number of cats hunters can take per year. It cannot be overemphasized: pumas are sensitive to overhunting and destruction of their habitat; yet, few states offer safeguards (i.e. science-based hunting quotas, protections for females and their young, and timely reporting of hunter success) to prevent overkill of pumas.
