



# MOUNTAIN LION FOUNDATION REVIEW

2012

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Spring

## California Fish and Game Commissioner Keeps His Job!

**Special California  
Fish & Game  
Edition!**

*"It has been over six weeks since the nefarious Daniel Richards made all the news by killing a cougar in Idaho. What has happened? Has the legislature taken any action to remove him? Please do not let this matter drop."*

**-- Concerned MLF Member**

As you may be aware, just a few months ago Dan Richards—one of California's five Fish and Game Commissioners—went on a hunting vacation in Idaho. There, he proudly shot and killed a frightened and exhausted 3-year old male mountain lion that had been treed for him by a pack of hounds. Richards then memorialized the event by posting photographs online and bragging to an "outdoor" news reporter that *"I'm glad it's legal in Idaho."* Needless to say, outraged citizens couldn't understand how such a man could head a Commission (*he had just assumed the mantle of President on a questionable 2 to 0 vote*) tasked with the duty of managing California's wildlife resources and representing the ideals and values of all Californians.



California Fish and Game Commission President Daniel Richards proudly displays his mountain lion trophy and says he's *"glad it's legal in Idaho."* January, 2012.

MLF joined with other conservation groups such as the Humane Society of the United States to raise sufficient awareness of Mr. Richards' unethical behavior to remove him from the Commission. We knew going in that this would be a nearly impossible task to accomplish but a necessary one if real reform of the Commission was ever going to take place. While Commissioners are appointed by the Governor, they can only be removed by a majority vote of both houses of the legislature; and that was only going to happen if enough voters told their elected representatives they wanted Richards out.

MLF's membership responded to our action alerts and news stories with an overwhelming show of support in written letters to the Governor, financial donations to help MLF keep the pressure on, and public comments on several of MLF's social media venues. All that, along with the efforts of the other organizations, generated enough public outrage to convince more than forty Assembly Members to sign on to a letter requesting Mr. Richards voluntarily resignation, with a similar letter circulated on the Senate side as well.

Unfortunately, while a lot of legislators were willing to ask Richards to leave voluntarily, most were unwilling to force him out. In the end, political pressure to drop the issue won out and Richards kept his seat—much to the pleasure of his "constituents" in the hunting community.



At a Commission meeting in Riverside on March 7th, Richards listens to citizens' comments about his Idaho hunting trip and his ability to lead the California Fish and Game Commission.

While this may look like a victory for Richards—he gets to keep his commissioner status for another eight months—in fact, like a small, rolling pebble that starts a devastating avalanche, the "Richards Incident" has sparked interest in the Capitol over the goings-on of California's Fish and Game Commissioners; and it has started a series of reforms which we believe might eventually complete the task—started 22-years ago with Proposition 117—of changing both the Department and the Commission into a state agency which protects California's wildlife for its own sake, and not just to satisfy the 1 percent of the population who hunt.

(See *"The Ensuing Avalanche"* Article on Page 2)

## Proposition 117 Under Attack Again!

As we were warned, the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) submitted Proposition 117's depredation reporting requirements for inclusion in Governor Brown's list of unnecessary reports. That listing is an attempt on the part of the Governor to save money by eliminating more than 700 duplicate or meaningless reports identified as such by the various state agencies. However, CDFG is justifying the inclusion of Proposition 117's report not on the basis that it is no longer required, or that it is a duplication of other reports, but because "*There is insufficient funding/staffing to complete this report; it has not been prepared for several years.*"

Proposition 117's legal requirement is that "*The department shall undertake a complete necropsy on any returned mountain lion carcass and report the findings to the commission. The commission shall compile the reported findings and prepare an annual written report that shall be submitted to the Legislature not later than the January 15 next following the year in which the mountain lion was taken.*"

Clearly the voters did not believe the reporting to be unnecessary. When MLF inquired into the fact that no such report had been submitted to the legislature since 2005, we were informed by the Fish and Game Commission that they were unable to comply with the law because the Department had not provided them with the findings necessary to create the report. The Department, on the other hand, failed to even respond to our polite inquiry and was obviously planning to use their willful act of noncompliance as an excuse for having the report eliminated.

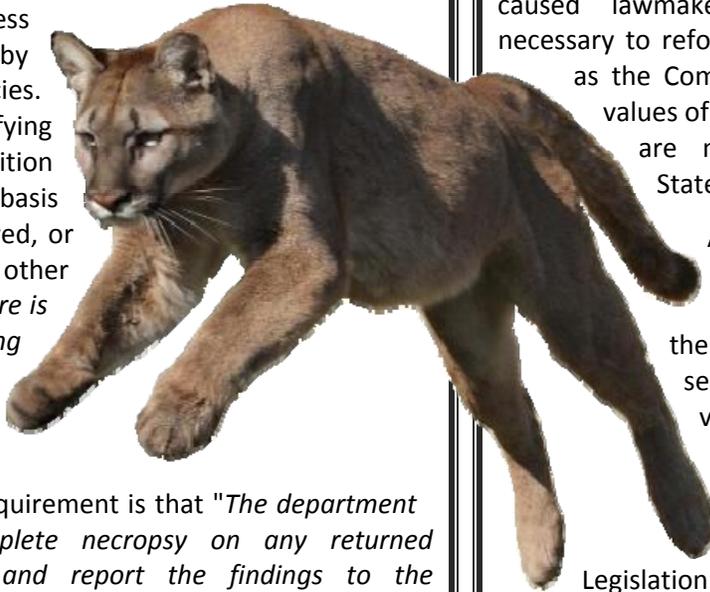
An informal inquiry by legislative staff on MLF's behalf received the explanation that all the relevant information was available on the Department's website. Unfortunately that is not the case. The depredation numbers posted on the Department's website are incomplete, several years out of date, and do not agree with the number of lions reported killed by Federal hunters contracted to CDFG.

It is MLF's contention that this deliberate attempt to minimize the importance of timely and accurate lion mortality reports by top Department managers has created a *laissez-faire* attitude at the field office level towards complying with Proposition 117's depredation permit issuance restrictions and has, over the years, resulted in an untold number of unwarranted lion deaths.

The process to eliminate unnecessary reports has not yet been clarified, so at this time we are not sure which decision makers will need to be notified. However, as a precautionary action MLF is calling upon each of its members to contact their political representatives—both Assembly Members as well as State Senators—and tell them that not only do you want Proposition 117's depredation report removed from the Governor's list of cuts, but you also want CDFG to comply with the existing law and let the public know what is happening to our lions!

Contact information for California Legislators is online at: <http://1.usa.gov/CaliforniaLegislators>

Or give us a call and we will provide you with your district's contact information.



*Richards Continued*

## The Ensuing Avalanche: CDFG and Commission Reform

Dan Richards may still be on the California Fish and Game Commission, but his outrageous actions have caused lawmakers to undertake the steps necessary to reform both the Department as well as the Commission to better represent the values of 99 percent of all Californians who are non-consumptive users of the State's wildlife resources.

An already enacted change is that the Commission presidency will no longer be given by default to the member with the most time served. Instead, Commissioners will vote in a credible leader and will likely replace Richards at the next meeting in Monterey on May 23rd.

Legislation currently in-process includes:

- expanding the ethics and conflict of interest code for CDFG Commissioners, also urges the Governor to appoint only those "*who will truly respect the principles of our great state's wildlife laws;*"
- renaming CDFG as the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (replacing "Game" with "Wildlife") since 99% of Californians do not hunt, which indicates the agency should view animals as valued wildlife rather than sport trophies;
- creation of an independent panel of scientific experts that will advise the Department and Commission to ensure integrity and science-based wildlife management;
- designing a new user-friendly way for non-consumptive visitors (those not hunting or fishing) to purchase passes—financially this relieves pressure on the agency to sell hunting tags to pay the bills—allowing hikers, bird-watchers, and other non-hunters to finally be seen as equal stake-holders in wildlife management;
- updating the Judicial Council (legal courts) with the latest wildlife laws so they can better prosecute poachers and issue appropriate penalties for those who violate the California Fish and Game Code; and
- banning the cruel hunting practice of using hounds to chase, exhaust, and eventually tree bears and bobcats so that they may be shot at close range out of a tree.



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