Hill To Introduce Legislation that Enables State Game Wardens to Partner with Wildlife Groups to Avert Killings of Mountain Lions

*Bill Requiring Consideration of Nonlethal Solutions Stems from the Shooting of Two Mountain Lion Cubs in Half Moon Bay*

**What:**

Senator Jerry Hill will introduce legislation that would require the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) to utilize nonlethal options when responding to incidents like the one that led to the fatal shooting of two mountain lion cubs by a game warden in the backyard of a home in Half Moon Bay on Dec. 1. Joining Hill, D-San Mateo, will be representatives of the Mountain Lion Foundation, Felidae Conservation Fund and Half Moon Bay Mayor Rick Kowalczyk.

Current state regulations do not give DFW much flexibility when mountain lions venture into areas populated by humans like the incidents that resulted in the Half Moon shootings and another mountain lion shooting in Redwood City in 2011. Hill’s legislation will also authorize the DFW to partner with wildlife groups and nonprofits when responding to such incidents if there is no imminent threat to human life. Current law doesn’t clearly authorize DFW to utilize the assistance of wildlife groups throughout the state even though they could help tranquilize and capture mountain lions.

**When:**

Friday, Jan. 25, at 10 a.m.

**Where:**

CuriOdyssey (wildlife museum)
1651 Coyote Point Drive.
San Mateo, CA, 94401

**Contact:**

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**Background:**

On Nov. 30, 2012, two sibling mountain lion cubs were observed in the 800 block of Correas Street in Half Moon Bay near Burleigh Murray Ranch State Park. The lions, which DFW officials initially said weighed 25 to 30 pounds, were fatally shot after game wardens and San Mateo County...
sheriff’s deputies were unable to shoo them out of the neighborhood. Necropsies showed the female lions were only about four months old, weighed 13 to 14 pounds, and were starving and unlikely to survive in the wild without their mother.

Recent incidents have renewed calls for change from wildlife organizations and residents from around the state. A petition by animal aid group Wildlife Emergency Services urging DFW to change its ways has already received over 1,000 signatures.

Hundreds of mountain lion sightings are reported every year in California. The reports range from simple sightings in the wild to the presence of lions in developed areas. Attacks on humans are rare. However, the incident in Half Moon Bay in December marked the second mountain lion shooting by a state game warden in San Mateo County in as many years.

Since the Half Moon Bay incident, wildlife advocates have met with DFW officials to come up with protocols to avert the shootings of mountain lions, which are “specially protected mammals” under Proposition 117, approved by voters in 1990. DFW’s rules, however, clearly state, "When evidence shows that a wild animal is an imminent threat to public safety, that wild animal shall be humanely euthanized (shot, killed, dispatched, destroyed, etc.)." Yet the way the guidelines are written, on-the-ground responses treat any situation where a lion "might somehow" come into contact with a human -- no matter how unlikely -- as a situation of "imminent threat."

The nonlethal procedures DFW will be required to utilize under Hill’s legislation include capturing, pursuing, anesthetizing, temporarily possessing, temporarily injuring, marking, attaching to or surgically implanting monitoring or recognition devices, providing veterinary care, transporting, hazing, relocating, rehabilitating, and releasing. However, the legislation still provides DFW with the authority to kill mountain lions if the lion can reasonably be expected to cause immediate death or physical harm to humans.

The legislation also clearly authorizes DFW to develop partnerships with veterinarians, scientists, zoos and other individuals and organizations to work with state game wardens when mountain lions wander too close to humans. This is an important change since wildlife and nonprofit organizations throughout the state have the capability and experience to assist with mountain lion incidents. As an example, the Peninsula Humane Society, which rescues and rehabs injured and orphaned native wildlife, saved the lives of 1,450 wild animals last year in San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

"The safety of Californians is priority number one, but the law needs to be changed to give wardens more nonlethal options when dealing with the increasing number of mountain lion encounters in our neighborhoods," Hill said.

"Californians value mountain lions as the last remaining apex predator in the state; contributing substantially to environmental health. Senator Hill's legislation reflects those values and will help to ensure that mountain lions remain in the wild for future generations to appreciate," said Tim Dunbar, executive director of the Mountain Lion Foundation.